Underworld Kings

LITTLE Bird

USA Today Bestselling Author

JENIKA SNOW

LITTLE BIRD

UNDERWORLD KINGS

JENIKA SNOW

OceanofPDF.com

LITTLE BIRD (Underworld Kings)

By Jenika Snow

www.JenikaSnow.com

Jenika_Snow@Yahoo.com

Copyright © December 2022 by Jenika Snow

First E-book and Paperback Publication: December 2022

Cover Designer: Cormar Covers

Editor: Lea Ann Schafer

Proofreader: Snow Queen Editing

Beta Readers: Judy Ann Loves Books, Jill Reading

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: The unauthorized reproduction, transmission, or distribution of any part of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of $250,000.

This literary work is fiction. Any name, places, characters and incidents are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or establishments is solely coincidental. Please respect the author and do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials that would violate the author's rights.

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

Synopsis

Prologue
THE PAST
1. Claudia
2. Claudia
3. Claudia
4. Dmitry
5. Claudia
6. Claudia
7. Claudia
8. Claudia
9. Claudia
10. Claudia
11. Dmitry
12. Claudia
13. Claudia
14. Claudia
15. Claudia
16. Dmitry
17. Claudia
18. Dmitry
19. Claudia
NOW
20. Claudia
21. Claudia
22. Claudia
23. Claudia
24. Dmitry
25. Dmitry
26. Dmitry
27. Dmitry
28. Claudia
29. Dmitry
30. Claudia
31. Dmitry
32. Dmitry
33. Claudia
34. Claudia

35. Claudia
36. Claudia
37. Claudia
38. Claudia
39. Claudia
40. Claudia
41. Claudia
42. Claudia
43. Claudia
44. Tatiana

Epilogue

About the Author

OceanofPDF.com

LITTLE BIRD

USA Today Bestselling Author

JENIKA SNOW

The first time I met Dmitry Petrov, he was making a deal for my sister's hand in marriage with his brother.

I should have hated him for that alone, but when he stopped my father from hitting me, my young heart felt something new and wonderful for the first time.

It was this incurable sensation that consumed me at his protection.

But he was nearly fifteen years older than me, more dangerous than any man I'd ever met, and only saw me as his sister-in-law's younger sibling.

And when he was arrested and thrown into jail, five long years passed. I refused to give up the notion that one day he'd see me as a woman—a woman he wanted. So I wrote to him daily, confided in him, told him about what was going on in my life, what I hated and loved. I did this all in the hopes he'd write back, wishing he'd want me the way I wanted him.

But year after year passed with no response. Until that changed. Until he wrote back. Dmitry was cruel and harsh, saying things that should have made me cry. Not make me want him more.

I knew I was playing with fire, sending a criminal pictures of myself after my eighteenth birthday, thinking about him as I did private things alone in my room. But he was a virus deep inside of me, and there was no cure for what I had.

And then my life completely changed when my brother tried to marry me off. I refused to be a pawn in the mafia world, and so my only option

was to leave the only home I’d ever known.

But when Dmitry’s released from prison, I came face-to-face with the Russian mafia leader everyone fears. And he made one thing very clear.

I’m his. He’s taking me. And anyone who tries to stop him will die.

For all TW/CW please visit: https://jenikasnow.com/books/little-bird/

OceanofPDF.com

PROLOGUE

CLAUDIA

It was only when my eyes adjusted to the dimness that I realized it was Dmitry, his immense body blocking out the only escape, the menace pouring from him tangible. I felt it snake across the small interior and wrap around me.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out. I didn't know what to say. I wasn't exactly shocked to see him in front of me. I was curious how he got through the property with no one seeing him, though. The Sisters seemed to know what everyone was doing.

But then I reminded myself this was Dmitry. He was probably used to being stealthy as hell.

Neither one of us said anything as he took a step closer. I moved one back, not sure why I was retreating. It wasn't like there was anywhere to go. It was the fact that I didn't really want to escape. I liked being in his presence, feeling his big, burly body pressed against mine.

He was hard where I was soft. He smelled spicy and woodsy, whatever cologne he wore subtle and not nearly as arousing as his natural scent.

And then there were his tattoos, ones I could see sneaking above the collar of his shirt and past his cuff links.

Danger and violence certainly had a beautiful face.

"How did you get in here?" It was a stupid question. I knew that as soon as the words left my lips. And I didn't actually expect an answer.

He didn't grace me with one. He just kept stalking closer until I found myself pressed against one window, his colossal body looming over mine, my head cocked back so I could look into his face.

The survival part of me whispered that I needed to keep this man in my sights. He was far too dangerous to do otherwise.

“I gave you a day,” he finally said, his gaze raking over my face, then dipping down to my breasts before slowly trailing up my throat to look into my eyes again.

Although I was completely dressed, my skirt falling below my knees, my socks covering my calves, and my blazer buttoned up tight, I felt completely naked under his appraisal.

“A day?” My voice sounded far away and hazy, everything around my vision blurry except for the man standing right before me. “You gave me a day for what?” I asked again when he had yet to respond.

The corner of his mouth kicked up, but it wasn’t a humorous smile. It was as if he’d been waiting for me to ask so he could be bluntly honest with his answer.

“To come to terms with the fact that I’m not letting you go, *detka*.”

My heart was beating a mile a minute, and I felt beads of sweat line the valley between my breasts and the length of my spine.

I felt electricity moving between us. The surge ignited all over my body to the point the follicles of my hair tingled with awareness. Just having Dmitry so close, not even touching me, was like I’d wrapped my hand around a live wire.

And I welcomed the electric shock it gave me.

“For five fucking years, you wrote me. I had zero interest in you for those first three and saw you as nothing more than Amara’s kid sister.”

Realistically I knew it was good he didn’t see me as anything more. But my heart, I realized now as he stood so close and said these things to me, broke a little that he’d seen me that way.

He took a step closer, and I felt his body heat seeping into me.

“And then you turned eighteen, your letters getting more personal, the pictures you slipped inside so fucking modest and innocent, yet it made my cock harder than the fucking cement that surrounded me. I knew I had to make you mine.”

My head fell back against the glass, making a soft *thud* that filled the small interior.

“I knew it was wrong to desire you the way I did, to think of the things I did.” He stroked my cheek. “In the middle of the night I’d grip my cock and

think about fucking you while I jerked off." His voice had gone lower, deeper on that last part.

The image of him lying in that prison cell, thinking about me as he found his pleasure, was a heady sensation inside of me.

I canted my hips, seeking something that only he could give me. My breasts rose as if I had no control over my body. The mounds felt so heavy, the peaks so tight as they scraped against the cotton of my bra. I'd never felt such combustible sensations and emotions moving through me.

His enormous body shuddered as he inhaled at the base of my neck again, and then reached out to loosen my blazer, then pop free the first two buttons of my blouse. Dmitry pulled one side of the crisp material down and dragged his tongue over my collarbone.

God, that was hot.

The wet glide along my flesh was more sexual than anything I could have ever imagined.

"Look at me."

I pried my eyes open, not realizing I'd even closed them. Dmitry's presence just had that effect on me, where all common sense and rationality flew out the window. Hell, it had probably gone right out the one behind me as soon as he stepped inside the shed and closed us in together.

When I looked up at him, all I saw was fierce need reflected in his gaze. His jaw was tight, with dark scruff covering his cheeks and chin. I found it immensely sexy that this man was reining in his control. *Because of me.*

And then as if everything happened in slow motion, he sank down. My heart beat overtime, faster than I even thought possible given it already felt like a racehorse lived in my chest cavity.

"W-what are you doing?"

He looked up at me with fire burning in his gaze and let his fingers skate over the back of my legs, up my thighs, and tightened the digits around my pleated skirt.

My inner muscles clenched, shooting a shock wave of unadulterated lust straight to my center.

"Getting a proper taste of you." His accent was thicker, his voice deeper.

OceanofPDF.com

THE PAST

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 1

CLAUDIA

FIFTEEN YEARS OLD

If my father knew what I was doing, he'd slap me across the face so hard I'd have a red mark there for days.

But even knowing I'd be punished if caught, I still snuck down the stairs, following the deep timbre of voices that came from my father's office.

My sister's words played in my head, a warning, a scold, whenever I did something that would get me in trouble.

"Claudia, you have a fire in your veins that is going to get you hurt. Listen to Father. Tread lightly with him. I know you live by your own rules, and as much as I love you for it, I'm also worried about you because of the world we live in. If a woman won't be submissive to the men in our lives…"

Right before I reached the bottom of the stairs, the grandfather clock chimed so loudly I froze, my heart jumping into my throat.

I was sure I'd get spotted. Even if the foyer was shadowy, all the staff had gone for the evening, and my father was in his office.

The clock chimed twelve times, signaling midnight had hit, and as soon as that last bell went off, I quickly descended the rest of the stairs and started making my way down the hallway.

I kept to the wall, my hands running over the textured damask wallpaper my father had imported from Italy. I slipped into the small room beside my father's office, moved over to the French doors, and quietly opened one of them.

Light spilled out of the open patio doors from the room beside me, and I heard a deep, thickly accented voice fill the night air.

“You know this is the best option for both families.”

There was a long pause, and then I heard some shuffling.

“And you can guarantee an alliance if I give you Amara?”

“She isn’t for me. She’ll be given to my younger brother, Nikolai.”

“Why wouldn’t I give her to you, the eldest?” My father sounded annoyed.

“My brother stands at my side and runs the Desolation Bratva. This is the only option for you and your daughter. But I can guarantee that the Bratva, aligning with the East Coast *Cosa Nostra*, will have unbreakable ties.”

My heart pounded as I listened. Although it wasn’t unusual for arranged marriages, they were talking about giving Amara away, not just to an Italian man in the circles our family ran with, but with the Russians. And the only thing I’d ever heard my father or anyone else in the *Cosa Nostra* say about the Russians was that they were barbarians and savages. Never to be trusted.

I realized I had my hand over my heart, the organ beating hard and fast. What I felt was fear. Terror for my sister, who had just been given away to a man who would be worse than my father.

It was bad enough we were bartered off like pawns to other criminals within the *Cosa Nostra*, but this? This was madness. He was giving my sister away as if she were a piece of meat.

“So, do we have a deal or not, Marco?”

It was the one I now knew was Russian who spoke, his accent so thick his words were almost indistinguishable. And I had a feeling it had to do with his annoyance over my father.

This man—if he was like any of the other men in my life—was used to getting what he wanted. They were used to people abiding by what they said without hesitation. My father continuously pausing, questioning him, was most definitely an insult.

“We have a deal. I’ll tell Amara tomorrow that she’s betrothed to your brother.”

“You can tell your daughter that her safety and happiness will be of utmost importance to Nikolai.”

My father snorted, and I curled my hands tightly into my nightshirt. The sound was dismissive, as if he didn’t care. And his next words affirmed that.

“*Non mi interessa. Una volta che Amara sarà sposata, suo marito potrà fare quello che vuole con lei.*” *I don’t care about that. Once Amara is married off, her husband can do what he wants with her.*

I hated my father. He was an evil, cruel man. He only loved himself and the Family. The *Cosa Nostra*.

I doubted he even had any affection for Gio, our oldest brother. He kept Gio close because my brother would take our father's place one day.

And hearing my father talk about how he didn’t care what Amara’s arranged husband did to her after they were married made me sick to my stomach.

I wondered if my father said that in Italian so Dmitry wouldn't understand. Although I didn’t know why he cared what anyone thought. Everyone had to know what an awful person Marco Bianchi was.

That’s why they were so afraid of him, why they did what he said, because they were fearful of the repercussions of going against the capo.

I knew Amara and Gio wanted to protect me, but I had a fiery streak, talking back to our father when I should’ve kept my mouth shut. I’d had my face slapped so many times, and had borne more bruises than I could count throughout my life.

But there was no way I could just wait until he married me off. And I knew he would in three years. When I turned eighteen.

I’d then be the prime age for him to give me away to one of his gross, far-too-old mafia friends. I’d be used, abused, and treated as a vessel, just to carry children or be a pretty trophy on his arm.

That was, unless I changed my destiny. I’d thought about running away so many times, just escaping and moving somewhere far away where no one could find me. But then I thought of my mother and how weak she was. I thought about Amara and how I would hate to leave her alone to deal with the fallout of it all. And then there was Gio.

He would be so worried. He would probably search for me day and night, and when he couldn’t find me, he’d blame himself.

“Fine. He can have her. But… *Se mi fotti, Dmitry, ti taglio le palle*.” *If you fuck me over, Dmitry, I’ll cut your balls off.*

There was a harsh laugh, one full of amusement, but something dark was laced within the sound.

"*Vai piano stronzo, i russi stanno estendendo la loro generosità verso di te con questa offerta.*" *Tread lightly, asshole. The Russians are extending their generosity toward you with this offer.*

I felt my eyes widen at Dmitry speaking in Italian, his words thick with a Russian accent.

My father cleared his throat, obviously not expecting the other man to know what he'd said. A smile spread across my face. I didn't know who this Russian was aside from the name my father called him, but I liked him more by the second.

But then I hated that thought and quashed it. They were pawning off my older sister. Screw both of them. All of them.

Before either man could say anything, there was a knock and I froze. For a moment I thought I'd been caught but then realized it came from my father's office.

I could hear one of my father's men murmuring softly in Italian. I couldn't pick up what he was saying aside from something about a phone call.

"Excuse me, Dmitry. I have to take this," my father said. "Make yourself comfortable and help yourself to another drink."

Although my father might've seemed hospitable, his tone was clipped and sharp. Cold.

It was the tone he used toward all of his children.

My father's office door opened and closed, and a second later I heard the other man murmur in Russian under his breath. The words were gruff and sharp, and I was pretty sure there was nothing pleasant about them. There was the *clink-clink* of glass hitting glass, then the sound of liquid being poured.

I waited a few seconds before I slowly slipped out the patio doors and crept toward my father's office. I kept to the stone wall, my palms flat on the rock. It felt like my heart was in my throat as I moved slowly, trying to be stealthy.

I didn't know why I was doing this. It was so reckless, but I wanted to put a face to the deep Russian voice who'd all but put my father in his place. I'd seen no one do that, and it gave me this rush.

One of the French doors to his office was opened, and I held my breath as I leaned around the corner to peek inside. My long hair fell over my shoulder, and I quickly gathered it up and kept it pinned to my nape with a hand, not risking him seeing the movement and knowing I was here.

My breath caught as I saw the Russian. He was huge, with massively broad shoulders and biceps that seemed as thick as my torso, and the dark suit he wore didn't hide the raw power he held. His hair was short and black, but with his back to me, I couldn't see what he looked like.

I could see he held a square crystal glass in his hand, his fingers so masculine. Long and thick, and tattooed. His glass held a couple fingers of dark liquid and ice inside. I watched as some condensation held onto the glass before slowly trailing down.

But I didn't see him actually drinking the liquor, and instead he set the glass on my father's desk.

Without using a coaster.

I bit my lip and felt another thrill move through me. My father was so anal that even water rings on his Italian imported desk threw him into a fit. And I knew from experience. I swore I still felt the sting of his palm cracking against my cheek when I'd set my glass of orange juice on his desk and he'd found out.

I would have thought the Russian wasn't aware of what he did, because honestly it was so minor an infraction, but when he ran a thick, tattooed finger over the rim, then lifted the glass an inch above the wood and let those droplets of water fall onto the desk, I smiled.

He knew exactly what he was doing.

This strange sensation moved through me, one I wasn't sure I could even place a name to.

And then he turned around, and I knew what I felt.

Desire. Attraction.

Dmitry wasn't what I'd call handsome, not classically, the kind of handsome that would have his face splashed across a magazine. He was too brutal looking, and this savage air surrounded him. He was also far too big and muscular, looking like a tank dressed in expensive material because he wanted to appear like he wasn't a beast.

He was painfully handsome to me, though, with striking blue eyes that seemed to clash with his dark features. Dmitry might wear a suit, but I could see more tattoos creeping from under his crisp button-up shirt. I also

spied dark ink snaking from the backs of his hands and disappearing under his cuffs.

I knew—just knew—his entire body was covered in dark shapes and lines.

I could hear the low buzzing coming from the pocket of his jacket and held my breath as he pulled out his cell phone. He turned partially toward me, his profile now clear.

His brows were furrowed as he stared down at what was clearly a text. And when he faced me fully, I could see that he couldn't be more than in his late twenties, maybe only thirty years old. But despite his younger age, there was this hard-core experience that surrounded him. Yes… this man knew about death and violence. He surrounded himself with it. He no doubt relished it.

He slipped his phone back into his pocket and picked up his glass, moving over toward my father's bookshelf, where he kept his collection of Fabergé eggs.

The Russian snorted in an almost irritated way as he reached out and touched one, lightly shifting it so it wasn't in the same position. I covered my mouth with my hand to suppress my laughter. *Oh yes.* He knew exactly what he was doing by messing with my father's things. Because the slight deviations in Marco's perfect little life wouldn't go unnoticed.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

My father's angry voice was like a whip against my skin, and I snapped my head in his direction.

"You stupid fucking girl. Now you're sneaking around in the middle of the night, eavesdropping?"

I'd been so focused on staring at Dmitry that I hadn't even realized my father had entered his office, or that he'd spotted me. I couldn't move, fear keeping me frozen in place as my father stormed toward me until he stood right in front of me.

I opened my mouth, not sure what I was going to say, but his palm rose, successfully having me snap my mouth closed.

Everything seemed like it was moving in slow motion, time crawling at a snail's pace. I felt my eyes widen, my heart dropping to the pit of my stomach.

I'd been hit plenty of times by my father. I knew how much it hurt, how the sting wasn't just superficial, that it burrowed itself deep down inside of

me, taking away another layer of hope I had that one day my father would look at me and tell me he loved me.

I braced, felt my body tense. I even flinched to prepare for it. And then I closed my eyes, bracing myself for the slap. But as the seconds ticked by, I opened my eyes to see Dmitry towering over my father. His tattooed hand curled around my father's wrist, Marco's palm still open in preparation to lay into me.

The two men glared at each other, and I was shocked that Dmitry, who didn't even know me, who I knew was just as dangerous as my father, had stepped in to intervene.

To protect me.

"This is not what we're going to do, Marco," the Russian said in his thickly accented voice that wrapped around me like a cocoon. "We don't go around hitting children."

I didn't like the way I felt when he called me that. A child. Although it was a foolish thing to pass through my mind. He was a grown man. I was barely a teenager. And as I stared up at him, I felt a strange sensation in my belly.

My father glared at the Russian for a long moment, his jaw clenched tight, his nostrils flaring.

Finally, he exhaled and jerked his hand out of Dmitry's grasp. "Claudia. Leave. Go upstairs to bed." Marco's nostrils flared again. "Never eavesdrop again."

I didn't want to leave. I wanted to keep staring at Dmitry, yet my feet were moving on their own as I turned and left. But not without looking over my shoulder once more.

My heart gave this strange little flutter as I noticed he was looking right at me, this hard expression on his face.

That was the first time I saw Dmitry. And I hadn't been able to get him out of my mind since.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 2

CLAUDIA

The wedding ceremony was beautiful, the reception classy and packed with people I didn't know.

But all I could think about was how terrified I was for my sister. Because when I'd first seen the beast of a man known as Nikolai Petrov, leader of the Bratva in Desolation, New York, all I'd pictured was another man like my father using Amara any way he saw fit.

I glanced at where Amara stood in the center of the dance floor as she swayed slowly with our father. I could see his pinched expression and her reserved one.

I wasn't a religious person by any means, despite my family being devout Roman Catholics, but I'd prayed nightly that my sister would be okay, that her new husband would take care of her, and that she wouldn't be hurt.

As if thinking about him caused all rational thought to leave me, I stared across the room at where Dmitry stood with his brother, Nikolai, and a few other Russian men.

I'd seen so much apprehension and uncertainty in Amara's face as she'd said her vows standing at that altar. And the entire time, Nikolai watched her with a look that screamed possession and obsession.

And I didn't know why, but that terrified me.

My gaze stayed on Dmitry. I hadn't seen him since he stopped my father from hitting me. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

The suit he wore was exquisitely tailored. But it didn't hide the raw power that seemed to pour off him.

Tattoos peeked out from underneath the collar of his shirt and the cuffs on his wrists. I took a moment to cut a glance at my new brother-in-law. Nikolai was just as frightening as his older brother. At only a few inches shorter than Dmitry, and not as bulky, it still didn't deter anyone and everyone from being terrified of him.

Nikolai was also covered in tattoos, ones I could see snaking out from underneath his tuxedo. What was with men in the mafia needing to showcase their masculinity, power, and affiliations by splashing them across their bodies?

I could see bulges under their jackets. I didn't have to wonder if they had weapons hidden underneath that expensive material to know the truth. In fact, as I looked around the room, I knew every single man in here had a gun strapped to their side.

I kept to myself and stayed seated at the table, drinking Shirley Temple after Shirley Temple. I snuck a glass of champagne, but I was regretting it now as the bubbles went to my head and made me feel a little nauseous.

I made my way to the bathroom and splashed water on my face, and when I braced my hands on the sink and stared at myself in the mirror, I felt as if I were looking at a stranger.

Amara was going off, now a married woman. I didn't know when I would ever see her again. Father certainly wouldn't let me go visit. I could barely leave the house as it was, and when I did, he would assign me an armed chaperone.

I was a prisoner in my own life, and nothing would ever get better. Not unless I escaped, or if I was killed. And the latter wasn't that farfetched, seeing as my father had plenty of enemies.

But I couldn't even leave the house alone. If I was lucky enough to have Gio with me, I could at least have a bit more freedom than if guarded by a chaperone. Gio at least let me wander the stores without being glued to my side.

But at twenty-one, Gio was being trained to take over after my father either stepped down or was murdered. And because of that, I was seeing him less and less.

I already felt so alone, suffocating under my father's control.

I closed my eyes and exhaled. There would be no leaving. Running away was always on my mind. But where would I go? What money would I use to survive? I couldn't run and hide with Amara.

I wouldn’t put her in danger.

In reality, running away was just a dream. I saw my life flash before me as my father married me off to a cruel man. I’d be beaten, used, and raped until I produced an heir.

Maybe after the latter, my husband would give me a reprieve and let me be.

Maybe that’s why I was so disobedient. Talking back and not caring that my father slapped me, cursed at me, and told me I was a worthless daughter.

Because in the end it didn’t matter if I got upset. It didn’t matter if I was sad or hurt. Nothing would change. My life was already written in the books.

I didn’t know how long I stood in the bathroom, but it was long enough that I was sure a few songs had been played. I knew nobody would miss me, probably not even realizing I was gone. I finally straightened, about to go back out there, when someone knocked on the door to use the facilities.

I left, ducking my head to use the long fall of my hair as a sort of shield, but not going back toward the reception hall.

I passed a few staff members bustling past me with trays in their hands. I wondered if they knew they were serving criminals and killers. I wondered if they knew how dangerous the men just down the hall really were.

Although I didn't have a chaperone with me, a guard was always with me. I wasn’t a fool in not knowing my father’s men surrounded this facility, that they were in the shadows, weapons strapped to their sides, fingers ready to pull the trigger.

But I took this small moment of independence in stride. As I moved down the hallway, the plush carpet under my high heels silencing my steps, I was lost in thought as I rounded the corner. The deep, rough voice of my brother-in-law coming from the other end of the hallway had my pulse pounding harder.

I moved forward, stopping before it rounded once more, and looked around the corner. I saw Nikolai standing in front of my sister’s guard, Edoardo. At a distance it might seem as if Amara’s new husband was just having a conversation with Edoardo. But the atmosphere was charged. It felt dangerous.

I could feel the volatile energy snaking its way down the hall and wrapping itself around me.

Time seemed to slow as I watched Nikolai pull out a gun and shoot Edoardo right in the head, splattering blood all over Amara's wedding dress.

My sister stood there in shock, eyes wide, lips parted as her security guard dropped to the ground, a corpse at her feet. My mouth cracked open, a scream welling in my throat but refusing to escape.

And then I felt a hand curl around my arm.

"Come on, *detka.* You don't need to see this."

I heard the voice, but it was distant, as if I were treading water. I let myself get pulled away because I felt like I was in such a haze, watching someone get murdered right in front of me.

My vision was blurry, and I tried to blink it back into focus, wondering if I was going blind. It was only when I realized I was outside, fairy lights from landscaped gardens creating this golden glow all around me, that I found the energy to suck in a great lungful of air.

Dmitry stared at me with an unreadable expression, like that one and only time we'd met. He was so tall and imposing, big and frightening that I took a step back.

"I won't hurt you, *malyshka*."

"What does that word mean?"

He was silent for a long time, then faced forward and stared out at the grounds. "It means 'little one.' It's a term of endearment."

I didn't know how that made me feel, but for just a second I wasn't thinking about all the bad things happening. I even smiled a little.

"I don't know why I'm surprised, why it shocked me so much," I murmured. I knew violence and blood ran through their veins. It was as if it were a lifesaving entity to them.

But I'd never actually *witnessed* it.

What I saw was nothing like the movies. It was horrifying and terrifying. It was my reality. I swayed.

"Come on. Sit down." Dmitry led me over to one of the wrought-iron benches and gently pushed me down. I sank onto the cold metal and placed my head between my legs, feeling nauseous.

I heard the swish of a lighter and smelled the smoke from a cigarette. I lifted my head to see Dmitry standing several feet back. He had one tattooed hand shoved into the pocket of his suit, the other lifting as he brought the cigarette to his mouth and took another long pull from it.

We didn’t speak, me because I couldn’t find any words after what I’d just seen, Dmitry—maybe—because he didn’t care or because he felt like he was babysitting me.

I stared down at my hands, which I’d thrust between my knees to keep them from shaking. I curled my fingers tightly into my palms, my nails digging into the skin.

“Was this your first time?” he asked as he exhaled, a cloud of smoke filtering out of his mouth before dissipating in front of him.

Dmitry kept his back to me as he stared out at the gardens. I didn’t answer for a moment, and he didn’t pressure me, didn’t ask again. After taking a deep breath and forcing my hands out from between my knees, I rose and walked over to him.

I could feel the body heat emanating from him, or maybe it was just because I felt so cold?

“Yes, it’s my first time seeing somebody killed.”

He said nothing, didn’t even look in my direction. But I knew he was listening. I felt it. He took several more hits off his cigarette, flicking the ash away in between each hit.

“For as much of a piece of shit as your father is, I’m surprised he shielded you from violence in our world.”

As if by memory, all the parts of my body that my father had hit throughout my life tingled. My cheeks. My arms and legs. All the places where he’d left bruises. They came alive to remind me.

Even my bottom ached in memory from when he’d brought his belt across me when I was just ten years old because I’d spilled his bourbon accidentally.

“I said it was the first time I’ve seen someone killed. Not that I’ve never experienced violence.” I felt Dmitry look at me then, but I refused to meet his gaze. I doubted I’d see sympathy or empathy.

I didn’t think men like him could feel such emotions.

When he wasn’t looking away, I finally glanced at him, pulling back my shoulders and tipping my chin up in an act of defiance.

Amara always gave me a hard time about being too free-spirited and loudmouthed. It was why I angered my father constantly, but we got one life in this world, and I didn’t want to spend it cowering and being a submissive person when the result was still going to be the same, no matter what.

I was still going to be sold off like a piece of meat to the highest bidder, whether I was docile and quiet or kicking and screaming the entire way.

Might as well make my future husband work for it and regret ever taking me as his wife.

Dmitry smirked. “Thatta girl. Don’t let them see you scared. Don’t let them ever use your perceived weakness against you.” Dmitry faced the gardens again, taking a long drag as he rested his forearms on the stone banister that surrounded the back patio.

Although he showed no emotion, and there really wasn’t any inclination in his voice when he said that to me, I did smile and felt this swell of pride fill me.

Because I could tell that this man, who didn’t know me at all, made me feel like I was stronger than I gave myself credit for.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 3

CLAUDIA

A WEEK AFTER THE WEDDING

I never realized how much life Amara had brought into the house until she was gone.

And after only a week of her being married off to Petrov, I was feeling the heavy weight and brunt of it settle around my shoulders.

Father had been busy with work, but when he was around, I stayed out of his way. I could hear him cursing and stomping, every little thing pissing him off.

He snapped at the staff, said horrible things to Mother, and demanded Gio go everywhere with him.

Then he'd be gone all hours of the night, sometimes not even coming home at all. I'd seen lipstick smeared on the collar of his button-down one morning, but I had said nothing.

Men in our world had mistresses. Mother knew. I knew. It was disgusting and disrespectful, and we were supposed to be okay with it.

The sound of silverware hitting plates, of a fire crackling in front of the dining room table didn't drown out the oppressive silence that always seemed to cling to my father.

I rested an elbow on the top of the table and used my fork and pushed around my food.

My appetite was nonexistent, or maybe it was the company that seemed to be a suppressant of my hunger.

"Why aren't you eating?"

My father’s clipped tone had me involuntarily tensing. I set my fork down and placed my hands in my lap, and gripped the linen napkin tightly. As I stared at my father, there were so many things I wanted to say. *I hate you. I wish you loved me. Why are you the way you are?*

But I bit my tongue and shrugged in response to his question.

“Quit playing with your food like a child.” His expression was as cold as ever as he picked up his wineglass and took a long drink from it.

My mother sat silently, submissively beside him, eating like a baby bird, as if she were forcing herself to swallow each bite.

“Where is Gio?” my mother softly asked, not looking at my father as she continued to eat.

“Work.” That one word was all she’d get. He didn’t even give her the respect of looking at her.

Work meant one thing. And that was doing my father and the *Cosa Nostra*’s bidding.

And as if my thoughts and my mother’s voice had conjured Gio, the sound of the front door opening and closing filtered into the dining room.

I heard his heavy football before he entered the room.

My mother didn’t look up, nor did my father at Gio.

I stared at my older brother and took in how he didn’t look as pristine and put together as he normally did, although it was clear he had attempted to. He always had this rough edge to him, and the tattoos that covered him from upper neck to the backs of his hands didn’t help soften him.

Whereas my father could seem more like a businessman and less like a capo in the Italian mafia by how he dressed and held himself, Gio screamed *criminal* in the very stereotypical sense.

Gio’s short black hair was disheveled, as if he’d been running his fingers through it. Maybe he’d just been working out?

But as I took a closer look at my brother’s appearance, I knew better.

His shirt was unbuttoned at the collar. And then there was something rust-colored splattered along the white material. He lifted his hands and smoothed them down his jacket, and I noticed his scuffed-up knuckles, ones that looked like they’d been recently tended to.

“Is it done?” my father asked, still not looking at my brother.

“Yes.” Gio took the seat beside me and started filling up his plate.

I picked up my fork and took a bite of my garlicky mashed potatoes, but the texture and flavor was more like wallpaper paste in my mouth.

There was no conversation, just this uncomfortable silence that I'd gotten far too comfortable with when in my father's presence.

"Has anyone spoken to Amara?" Gio asked in between bites.

He was the only one who could get away with saying things my father didn't want to talk about. And Amara was one of them.

"She's married off. She's not our problem anymore." My father's voice was like a whip across the table, and I looked at my brother, then back at Marco.

I wanted to ask why he was so cruel, how he could just forget about his daughter simply because she was no longer his "problem."

I wanted to yell at my mother and tell her to grow a spine, to ask her if she didn't miss her daughter. But I pursed my lips, clenched my jaw, and stared at my brother.

He seemed unaffected by our father's cold exterior as he shoveled bite after bite into his mouth. I noticed he had a bruise forming on his temple, and more splatters of what I could only assume was blood behind his ear.

Not even the dark ink that covered him could hide the gore.

I swallowed down the bile, not really shocked by the clear violence my brother took part in, but knowing it was part of our lives.

My brother didn't respond, and my father went back to drinking, but then Gio let his fork fall to the plate with a clatter, grabbed his napkin, and wiped his mouth as he glared at our father.

"Just because she's married doesn't mean I can't speak about my sister or ask how she's doing."

Suddenly everything became quiet, with me physically tensing.

I glanced between them. My mother kept her focus on her plate, her throat working as she swallowed. I hated that she acted like this, that she had become so weak and docile, her fear so suffocating that she wouldn't even stand up for her own children.

But I also felt sad for her. I wanted to help her even if she didn't want to help us.

I couldn't remember the last time she'd stood up for me or told my father not to lay his hands on me, not to insult or curse at me. No, she turned a blind eye, not caring about anything but her own skin.

Gio leaned back and picked up his glass of wine that had just been filled by one of the staff. His expression wreaked dominance and challenge directed right at my father.

“What about you, Mother?” Gio asked. “Have you talked to your eldest daughter?”

My father slammed his fist down on the table, the dishware bouncing a second before some glasses tipped over from the force.

I jumped involuntarily and my mother shrank farther into herself.

Gio looked completely unaffected as he downed the rest of his wine and reached for the bottle, pouring a fresh glass.

I stared at the bruises that covered his knuckles and pictured how he must have gotten those. *What did the other person look like? Probably dead.*

He did our father’s bidding, was a tool to exact violence so Marco’s hands didn’t get dirty.

And although I loved my brother, was proud of him for standing up to my father, I also wasn’t a fool in thinking he might not be exactly the same man sitting before us if he had that kind of power.

Because people changed when they had authority.

“I have some news for you, Claudia.”

Instantly my body reacted. My spine straightened and my head snapped up as I stared at my father. He wasn’t looking at me, instead gazing into his wineglass as he rolled the liquid around.

Finally, as if he could now grace me with his focus, my father stared into my eyes.

“I have a potential suitor coming by next week. Piero of the Rossi family**.”**

The name didn’t ring a bell, but it wouldn’t have mattered even if it did. My opinion on any of this was inconsequential.

“The match will be good and will create an alliance between our two families.” He was silent for a moment, his head cocked to the side as if he were waiting for me to say something. “If your suitor is pleased with you, the wedding will be set three years from now, on your eighteenth birthday.”

Happy fucking birthday to me.

I was sure he was expecting an outburst from me. I was good at them.

But I kept my teeth clenched together, refusing to give him the satisfaction. That’s what he wanted, anyway. He wanted to see the hurt, the display of shock on my face.

He wanted me to fight back so he could punish me, like it was some sadistic ritual for him.

Father lifted a dark eyebrow, clearly surprised I said nothing. When the corner of his mouth kicked up, I clenched the linen napkin in my lap so tightly the fibers seemed to embed themselves in my flesh.

It was then I felt a heavy weight land on top of my two curled ones. I looked down, seeing Gio's tattooed hand covering mine. When I looked at him, he had his focus on our father.

His expression showed nothing. He had such a good poker face, but the minor act of solidarity and support meant a lot in easing some of the volatile stress building in me.

My father snapped his fingers, and the servant came in. Marco waited until his place setting was cleared before rising and picking up his now refilled glass of wine. Without saying a word to his family, he turned and left, the sound of his heavy footfalls growing more distant the farther away he walked.

I exhaled and slumped in my seat, refusing to cry. I had to be strong. I had to think of a way to get out of this.

Because I would not end up like Amara, forced to be with a man who would beat and rape me with zero repercussions because I was his wife.

His property.

No. I wouldn't ever allow a man to treat me like I was an inanimate object solely for his pleasure.

Fuck. That.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 4

DMITRY

"I'll toughen you up yet, boy."

It wasn't my father's words that had icy fear skating down my spine. It was the way he looked at me, the sadistic glint in his eyes.

A part of me hated Leonid Petrov.

A piece of me wanted to love him because he was my father.

But the strongest part of all appeared like a tidal wave. It crashed inside of me and filled me with unadulterated terror whenever he walked into a room.

At fifteen years old I should have still been treated as the child I was. I should have been innocent, cherished, and shown so much love I suffocated in it.

But that would have been a wish for a child who'd had any sort of normal childhood.

Because when you were the son of the Pakhan of the Desolation Bratva, you're specifically bred for one reason.

To be molded and trained to follow in my father's footsteps. To be the heir he needed.

As the eldest son, it rested on my shoulders, and I gladly took that responsibility if it meant protecting my younger siblings, Nikolai and Tatiana.

Tatiana would be spared, seeing as she was a female. But she'd still be used like a pawn, sold off to a man of my father's choosing simply to gain power and make political moves.

Nikolai… He would be the weapon my father needed to deal with the ugly side. Nikolai would be the emotionless brute who'd use his sociopathic

tendencies to do what no one else could.

"By the wall, boy. You know what to do."

My father didn't wait for me to respond or act. He turned away from me and walked over to where he kept his tools.

I instantly felt the fire racing along my skin as I moved to the wall, pressing my back to it. I rolled up my shirtsleeves, placed my arms on either side of me, and breathed in and out slowly. He hated when I showed pain and fear.

Sometimes it was unavoidable. But I had trained myself all these years to bury those emotions deep down.

My father came back around, the bamboo cane in his hand rusty. My blood. Nikolai's blood. And God knew who else he'd used it on.

He stopped a foot from me and looked down at me, the severe expression on his face enough to make a weaker man cower.

But I was used to it. I was immune. Numb.

Without preamble or another word spoken, he brought that cane down across my exposed forearms repeatedly, beating me until they ran red with blood and the viscous fluid slid down to my fingertips before dripping onto the floor.

And still I stood exactly as I had from the beginning—stoic. I stared him in the eye, biting my tongue so hard I tasted a metallic tang fill my mouth.

One day things would change.

One day I'd be stronger.

And Leonid would be the one who had to bite his tongue so he didn't scream.

I woke up in a cold sweat, my heart thundering so hard I could hear it in my ears. I ran a hand over my damp face, wiping away the beads of perspiration covering me from head to toe.

"You fucking bastard," I murmured and closed my eyes before pushing myself up with a grunt.

Even from the grave, my fucking father haunted me, reminders of my horrendous childhood and the abuse at his hands.

I got up and went to the bathroom, splashing cold water on my face, and then leaning on the vanity and just trying to calm myself. I stared into the mirror, looking at the man I'd become.

On the outside I was strong, big, someone you didn't fuck with or I'd take your life without a second thought.

Women from the Old World crossed themselves when they saw me.

Children cried to their mothers when I walked by.

Men glanced down so they didn’t make eye contact.

I didn’t get sadistic pleasure out of these reactions. I wasn't my brother, after all. But it was a necessary evil when you were the leader of the Russian mafia in Desolation, New York.

I looked down at my arms. The ink trailed from my wrists, marking the backs of my hands and snaking all the way up my shoulders and neck, covering my back. It wasn’t just art.

It was a shield, camouflage. Especially on my forearms, where the scars from the cane took piece after piece of me.

The marks my father had given me to “toughen me up” were forever part of me now.

You couldn’t see them anymore, not unless the light hit them just right. Not unless you ran your fingers over my skin and felt the raised marks.

There was no shame in what I carried. They weren't something I ever wanted to forget, even if I covered them up.

The memories of my childhood abuse brought me back to when I’d met with Marco Bianchi, how I’d stopped him from hitting his fifteen-year-old daughter.

The rage I felt that day was something I hadn't experienced in so long.

On the outside I’d looked collected. Calm. But on the inside I’d been simmering with rage, wanting nothing more than to snap his hand and bust his nose until blood poured out of it.

I knew most men in our circles saw women as nothing but property. Our own father had been that way, had seen his children as nothing but heirs, replacements for when he was gone.

He didn’t love us, didn’t give two shits about us. That’s how most of these men were. But things had changed—were continuously changing—now that Nikolai and I ran the Desolation Bratva.

We wanted our women to be strong, to fight for themselves and be independent. We wouldn’t fucking stand for abuse. No longer.

The reign of terror from Leonid Petrov was no more.

I growled as my thoughts went back to Marco. That fucker. Just thinking about him annoyed the shit out of me. I curled my hands into fists as I remembered him about to hurt his daughter. He was lucky I’d let him go with just a fucking bruise, the *mudak*. *Asshole*.

No matter how much I wanted to beat his ass until he was black-and-blue, I needed his alliance. It was the whole reason we'd arranged a marriage between the Bratva and *Cosa Nostra*.

I went back into the bedroom, saw that it was three in the morning, and also knew I wouldn't be able to get back to sleep. I dressed in my workout gear, deciding to kill a couple hours in the gym before heading to do some work.

I heard the light *click-clack-click-clack* on the floor. A second later Sasha nosed the bedroom door open and strode in.

"Hey, beautiful girl," I cooed and crouched down on my haunches to scratch the Doberman behind the ear. I pulled my cell out and sent a text to Rodion. After putting it back in my pocket and paying Sasha some attention, I stood to finish getting ready. Five minutes later there was a knock on my door.

I had security up the ass around this building, with state-of-the-art cameras, locks, and infrared surrounding all access points. I also had men stationed around the exterior because I didn't fully trust technology. I could kill a man with the touch of a button if need be.

I let Rodion in, and Sasha trotted over right away, sitting at my side and staring at the other Russian. I stroked her head as I gave orders to the foot soldier.

"I'll be back later. Have her home by then, and make sure you give her the steaks in the fridge after her walk."

Rodion nodded and clicked his tongue, calling for Sasha to follow. They left the apartment, and I grabbed my duffel. I made sure I had my guns before pulling one out and strapping it to my side. I threw on a hoodie just as my phone pinged. I grabbed it, reading the text.

MISCHA

He's here for training. Should I have him start without you, or do you want to wait to see him train?

I didn't need to see how my newest fighter trained. I'd already witnessed how bloodthirsty he was in the cage. It's why I'd brought him into the fold. With my headliner, *Razoreniye*—Ruin—having told me he wanted out, I'd been in search of someone who could be a contender to the brutal savagery that Ruin had given the spectators. I'd needed someone just as psychotic. And I'd found him. He was known as *d'yavol. Devil.*

DMITRY

He knows what to do. Start without me. I'll be there later this morning.

I slipped my phone into the pocket of my hoodie and took the elevator down to the garage.

I owned the entire building, the basement level holding my vehicles, the other two floors storage, and then my place with the entire top level. I'd completely gutted it, making the space open and airy.

It was simple yet modern, with a minimalistic aesthetic that eased my normally chaotic mind. I had enough clutter and shit going on in my life that I didn't want my house to reflect that as well.

I went with the Porsche 911, tossed my bag onto the passenger seat, and climbed in. I started the engine, revved it, then entered the code that let me out of the garage.

The car was too flashy for the likes of Desolation. A city that was a cesspool of criminals and degenerates. Men like me. Nikolai.

Twenty minutes later and I was pulling into the alleyway behind the gym the Bratva owned.

It was a rough neighborhood. The building itself was beat to hell and run-down, but inside we'd renovated it so it held all the creature comforts of what we needed to train properly.

I got out and grabbed my bag, seeing a few vagrants and drug addicts down the street.

They eyed the car curiously, but when their focus landed on me, they glanced away. They wouldn't fuck with my shit, not if they wanted to keep breathing.

The dirty yellow glow from the streetlights washed everything in muted hues. I took the back entrance, where a Bratva guard was stationed by the rear door. He gave me a nod before opening it so I could step inside.

The gym was open twenty-four hours because career criminals like ourselves didn't keep "normal business hours."

Everything was still and silent. Perfect.

I wanted to beat the fuck out of the punching bag for a couple of hours before sparring and get some of this aggressive energy out of me.

I stood in front of the punching bag, taped up my hands, and then went to work on it. I slammed my fist into it repeatedly. *One-two-two. One-two-two.* I struck faster and harder. The bag swung wildly from the force. Before

I knew it, I'd been at it for an hour, sweat dripping down my hairline and soaking my shirt.

I stripped down to just my boxing shorts and kept going at it. A lot of shit went through my mind as I beat the living hell out of the bag and then switched to free weights.

Work. The underground fights. Marco fucking Bianchi and his arrogant, abusing ass.

I heard the back door open and slam shut, followed by heavy footfalls coming closer. I sat up on the bench, panting, my body completely soaked with sweat and my short hair plastered to my forehead. Nikolai strode in wearing a three-piece suit, his hands in his pocket and a sardonic smirk on his face.

“Couldn’t sleep?”

Nikolai leaned against the wall and looked around the gym. “Who the hell wants to sleep when I have Amara?” He grinned slowly.

I didn’t bother responding, just grabbed a towel and dried myself off before chugging down a bottle of water.

My brother was only a year younger than me and a crazy fuck and recently married. But he was loyal to a fault, and I knew he was the only one who genuinely had my back. We’d also had the same goal in mind our entire lives.

To take down our father and get control of the Bratva.

And we’d fucking succeeded in that.

As if he knew where my thoughts were, he tipped his chin toward the back and I followed him into the office. I shut the door, and he took a seat on the leather couch.

“Already checked for bugs. It’s clean,” I said as I saw his gaze sweeping across the room. I sat opposite him and leaned forward, resting my forearms on my knees and stared at my taped-up hands.

Despite my knuckles being covered, my skin was red, the ache and throb settling deep in them something I relished. I flexed my fingers and curled them in repeatedly.

I wasn’t a masochist, but I fucking loved the pain I felt in that moment.

“How’s married life?” I asked my brother and glanced up.

Nikolai leaned against the couch and threw his arms over the back of it, his grin slow and totally fucking satisfied.

“I guess that answers my question.” I ran a hand over my face, the scruff along my cheeks and jaw scraping over my fingers. “I’d ask if that pretty Italian wife of yours is treating you well, but clearly she is.”

Instantly the grin was gone, and a hard look crossed my brother's face. It was my turn to lean back on the couch and smirk.

“Watch your fucking mouth.”

I chuckled and shook my head. “Damn, Nikolai. You’ve gone and got yourself pussy whipped all in a matter of a week.”

My brother growled, but I could see the seriousness in his face.

I grinned but held my hands up in surrender. “Fine, I’ll behave and keep my mouth shut where she’s concerned.”

He grunted as if that placated him, and leaned back once more.

“What’s happening in the underground?” I shifted on the couch and scrubbed my hand over my damp hair. Nikolai was my partner. We were dual Pakhans who ruled over Desolation.

I controlled the legitimate side of things and dealt with our business associates who needed a discreet way of concealing their illegal activities: embezzlement, racketeering, money laundering, and the sort.

Nikolai ran the underground, working in close company with the Ruin, an organization that was a hub of illegal activity. My psychopathic sibling had a penchant for blood and death. I was pretty sure the crazy fucker got off on that shit.

Nikolai was silent for a moment, throwing his arms over the back of the couch once more. Then he got settled in.

“Well? How much of a resistance to the change of leadership do we have on our hands?”

Nikolai looked almost bored, but I could see his expression was one of him thinking things over. He might come across as playful in a psychotic way to those closest to him, but he had a brilliant mind and was one of the most violent men I knew.

Right up there next to me.

“Well, you know we have some people going against the grain.” He drummed his fingers on the leather, still looking bored even though I knew he was anything but. “But we’ll weed them out.”

The majority were ready for change. The ones who were against it had a lot to lose. They had status with Leonid. They made a lot of money going behind his back and bartering deals with others. That stopped now.

I made a noise in the back of my throat as I thought about what he'd said. "We have to take them out. I'm not about rehabilitating. If they're against us now, they'll always be against us. We need to dig out the rot before it spreads."

Nikolai grunted his agreement. "I can have it taken care of tonight."

I nodded.

"Get it done. Quickly. But make sure you send a message. I want everybody to know what will happen if they go against us."

Nikolai slowly grinned, that sadistic streak that ran in both of us coming forth in a burst. "I'll make sure it's done exactly how we want."

I nodded and pushed myself up off the couch, and Nikolai did the same. "Are you working or working out?"

"I'm headed home for a while." He gave me a sly look, and I chuckled, knowing exactly what he needed. To go see his new pretty young Italian wife.

I thought back to her father. Nikolai turned and looked at me, a dark eyebrow cocking. "What?"

"I don't know." I ran my hand over my nape. "I have a bad feeling about Marco Bianchi."

All curiosity and amusement left Nikolai's face as he visibly tensed. "Why? Did something happen?"

I hadn't told him about Marco, about me stopping the fucker from hitting the youngest Bianchi girl. "I stopped him from hitting Amara's sister when I went to set up the marriage between you two."

Nikolai's brows furrowed, and I could feel the anger rising in him. We might both be psychotic killers, but we didn't hit women, and we certainly didn't abuse children.

"I know Amara has been worried about her sister, concerned that Marco would direct his anger at Claudia, especially since she told me Claudia has a mouth on her."

"I'll monitor the situation. We can't kill him without starting a war, but he may just need another message sent that his actions won't be tolerated now that we're family."

Nikolai grunted in agreement.

"What about Tatiana?"

Nikolai made a dismissive sound in the back of the throat. "She's pissed with the suggestion that she visit with family in Moscow, but besides that,

she’s too detached from that side. It'll be too much of a culture shock for her. She’s never even left the States. She’d have no one.”

Our younger sister, only eighteen years old, had been born and bred by our father to be what he thought was a “good Russian mafia wife.”

My father had loved none of his three children, but he’d been protective of Tatiana in a way someone was with a precious piece of property they wanted kept safe.

Protective in a ruthless way that had caused a man to lose his life because Leonid hadn’t like the fact that he’d *looked* at Tatiana.

She’d been groomed and molded from a young age to be timid and submissive. It was archaic, barbaric, but she was strong and went against the grain more than once.

We kept her as safe as we could from our father, not letting him hurt her physically, but his words had been like a whip, lashing her skin and opening up her tender flesh.

But she was also smart, knew to keep her head down and follow directions in order to stay alive. And now she didn’t have to worry about that shit cause Leonid was dead, and we’d never force her to marry anyone she didn’t want to. And no one would lay a fucking hand on her.

“I’m not going to force her to go if she doesn’t want to.”

“I figured as much,” Nikolai responded. “Besides, I’d rather keep her close so we can make sure she’s safe. I don’t trust those bastards in Moscow. For all we know, they were up Leonid’s ass trying to get in good with him. They might still do his dirty work, even though he’s buried six feet under.”

“Agreed.” It was settled. Tatiana would stay here. She was still in danger, but at least she'd be here with us where we could protect her.

“All right, brother.” Nikolai clapped me on the back before leaving.

I grabbed my duffel, took a shower, dressed in a suit, and headed to the abandoned warehouse where the underground cage fight training happened.

Couldn’t exactly teach someone how to kill a man with one hit in a normal gym.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 5

CLAUDIA

I didn’t know how long it had been since Amara had married Nikolai Petrov. A couple weeks? Time really just melded together at this point.

And I was lonely. So alone that sometimes I just felt like a shell walking around.

My cheek burned, and my tears were locked down tight. I focused on the sound of the fire crackling beside me and inhaled the scent of the wood slowly getting eaten by the flames.

I refused to show how much I hurt, not just because my father hit me and that shit hurt, but because another piece of my heart had been chiseled away in the hope my father could love me.

So I kept my head down, my hands clasped in my lap, and used my hair as a curtain to shield me from everything around me.

“Mr. and Mrs. Petrov.”

The servant’s voice wouldn't pull me from my position if not for the fact that I knew they spoke because my sister was here for a visit.

I glanced up through the curtain of my hair to see Nikolai and Amara coming into the room, and for that moment I felt genuine happiness.

Mother stood over by the bar mixing a drink, and I lowered my head again, squeezing my eyes shut because I knew there was a mark on my face and Amara would notice.

I peeked through my hair again to see Mother embracing Amara, but it looked awkward and stiff. And that was because our mother wasn’t really our mother anymore. She didn’t care about her children. Our father had twisted my mother up and turned her against her own children.

“It’s so good to see you, Amara.” Mother pulled back, her hands curled around Amara’s shoulders as she smiled at my sister. “Married life suits you. You’re glowing.”

Amara’s face turned pink, and she cleared her throat before saying, “Thank you.”

Mother finally addressed Amara’s husband. “Mr. Petrov, a pleasure.”

He gave her a tight-lipped smile. “Oh no, Fernanda. Call me Nikolai. We are, after all, family now.”

Mother appeared flustered but inclined her head. “Claudia,” she finally acknowledged me. It was the first time she had since we’d been brought into the sitting room as we waited for Amara.

And when I finally steeled myself and glanced up, I saw the wash of emotions on Amara’s face as she stared at me.

“Claudia,” Amara whispered and was standing in front of me a second later. “What happened?” She reached out and let her fingers hover over my face as if she were afraid to touch me.

“It’s nothing. An accident.” Mother spoke, but Amara didn’t look away from me.

“Father did this.” Amara’s voice was so low I knew I was the only one who heard.

“It’s fine,” I said in a hard whisper. The last thing I wanted to do was talk about this. With anyone.

Amara reached out to take my hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze, followed by a slight nod. I knew what she was trying to say without uttering the words. *It’ll be okay.*

After a prolonged moment, Amara exhaled and looked over my shoulder at her husband. I did the same, seeing Nikolai’s jaw set hard and anger on his face. And then his focus turned to me. I saw a muscle under his jaw clench and relax before repeating the action.

“I know Marco mentioned having a word with you before we sit down for dinner,” our mother addressed Nikolai.

He casually placed his hands inside his coat pocket and stared down at her with a blasé expression. “And where is he? He couldn’t greet us at the door? He sent you to be his errand boy?”

I bit my lip at the tone he used speaking with Mother.

A startled gasp left our mother. “Excuse me, Mr. Petrov?”

Nikolai gave her a tight smile. “You heard me. How about you tell Marco we’re waiting in here for him? If he needs to speak with me, he can walk his ass to his own sitting room and address me himself instead of sending his wife to do it.”

Mother’s face turned red and she bristled, but she also knew her place and held her tongue. Instead of speaking, she smoothed her hands down her dress and nodded once before side-eyeing Amara and me, then leaving the room.

When she was gone, I couldn't hold in the little laugh that bubbled out of me. Amara and Nikolai stared at me. “Holy shit.” I laughed even harder. “That was probably the greatest thing I’ve ever seen.”

No one spoke for several long moments, and then I heard the heavy footsteps of my father approaching. My mother’s heels clicked on the tile as she no doubt followed closely behind.

I was suddenly pulled off the couch by Amara, her hand clasping mine as she walked us over to where Nikolai stood.

A second later the sitting room doors burst open and our father’s anger was like a rush of heat and decay that filled the room. His cheeks were colored beet red, his dark eyes narrowed on Nikolai.

Mother stepped in behind him, turned to close the door, and then moved off to the side where she could clasp her hands behind her back and stay silent like a good little Italian wife my father had shaped.

Weak. I’ll never be like her. I’ll never let a man control me the way Father does with Mother.

“You come to my home, insult my wife, and demand things from me?”

There was this weird tone in Father's voice, as if this had nothing to do with the way Nikolai had spoken to Mother.

That was clearly something deeper going on between them. No doubt issues within the Bratva and *Cosa Nostra* association.

“You forget who you’re talking to, Bianchi.”

Nikolai didn’t move, didn’t raise his voice. He seemed almost… bored.

“*Sporco bastardo russo del cazzo! Dovrei sventrarti come un pesce e dare da mangiare ai cani le tue viscere. Non sei degno di essere collegato alla mia famiglia.*” *You dirty Russian fucking bastard. I should gut you like a fish and feed your entrails to the dogs. You’re not worthy to be connected to my family.*

I felt my eyes widen at the horrible things he said to Nikolai.

“Father,” Amara finally snapped and took a step forward. “You will not speak to my husband that way.” Nikolai’s arm snapped out instantly, a bar in front of her that kept Amara from going any closer.

Father laughed darkly. “Is this what the Russians allow?” He addressed Nikolai, but he was staring at Amara. “You let your women fight your battles?”

Nikolai started laughing. “A man is only as strong as the woman at his side. For there wasn’t just Satan but Lilith as well.”

My father narrowed his eyes before looking at Nikolai.

“And if you have a weak woman beside you, well…” Nikolai shrugged, and his unspoken insult was loud.

Our mother *was* weak from years of being subjected to Father’s abuse and demands.

My father opened his mouth just as the doorbell rang. A moment later I heard the door opening, followed by soft, unintelligible voices slowly filtering into the sitting room.

Father still glared daggers at Nikolai, and I tightened my hand in Amara’s.

“Why don’t you just tell me why you’re really here, *Russian?*”

Although my father had arranged the marriage between Amara and Nikolai, forming a blood tie between the Desolation Bratva and the East Coast *Cosa Nostra*, it was very clear he didn’t agree with it.

But he’d gotten direct orders from the higher-ups to orchestrate their union, so he was shit out of luck and would never go against orders.

“Why am I here?” Once again Nikolai’s voice was even. “I thought we were here to have dinner with *family*?” The way Nikolai spit out that last word told me he didn’t consider Marco such.

Mother started speaking to Father quickly in Italian, but my father refused to look away from Nikolai. And when he lifted a hand in Mother’s direction, she became silent instantly.

Something shifted in the air, and everyone became even more tense.

Noise drew all our attention to the entryway. The servant stood beside Francesca, a girl who ran in the same circles as us. She was Amara’s age, but I knew the two didn’t talk or hang out, even if they saw each other frequently because of who our families were. But after Amara got married, I’d started seeing Francesca around even more.

She’d tell me about how awful her father was, how her mother was too busy going to parties and drinking wine to pay attention to her. The staff at the house ignored her, and the friends she had hated her.

And as we started becoming closer, she admitted to having her relationship with Edoardo, my sister’s former bodyguard. That had been a shock to me. Although I knew Nikolai had killed Edoardo, the rumors I’d heard had nothing to do with Francesca having a relationship with him.

She’d confided in me, that secret I knew she’d have to take to the grave or risk tarnishing her family's reputation. Because God forbid a female of her social standing had premarital sex and fell in love with someone they wanted, especially a lowly foot soldier.

She’d show up out of the blue and just want to sit and talk. We’d watch movies and walk the grounds, but most of the time she’d just want to talk. About anything. Everything.

I felt like she just wanted a friend and had to assume she was lonely, that she didn’t have the closeness of her family or siblings to rely on.

Francesca looked at everyone with wide eyes, her oversize jacket dwarfing her and her hair looking windblown.

The silence stretched out, heavy and thick. There was something off about Francesca, something about her demeanor that screamed she was panicked and on edge.

Although she appeared fine, relatively speaking, she had this glossy, red-rimmed tint to her eyes. I could only assume something had happened at home.

Francesca looked around the room with a startled expression, her hands moving up and down her jacket as if she were trying to smooth away invisible wrinkles.

“Oh. I didn’t realize there were… family plans going on.”

“It’s okay,” I said, feeling bad for Francesca. She looked like something was really bothering her, like she just… needed someone to talk to.

Amara let me go, and I walked around my sister and Nikolai to stand beside Francesca. When I saw the confused look on Amara’s face, I gave her a reassuring smile.

I knew my sister didn’t understand this new friendship I’d struck up with Francesca, but I’d been so lonely that having her just start coming to the house unannounced made me feel like maybe I wasn’t so… alone.

“Now is not the time, Francesca.” My father spat out the words and cast a withering stare in her direction, which had her cowering and taking a step back.

My anger that he was frightening her even more rose.

“I just wanted to talk,” she whispered as she stared at Marco.

Father huffed out and stormed toward her, taking her by the arm and pulling her out and into the foyer.

I opened my mouth to protest, but all I could do was follow my father as he all but dragged Francesca away.

Father and Francesca stood in the foyer, my father a foot from the smaller girl, his hand swinging between them and his hushed voice slightly raised in clear anger.

“I don’t understand what’s going on,” Amara whispered, and I shook my head in response. I didn't know if she was even talking to me.

And then Father was striding away from Francesca, who was now crying heavily by the front door and staring at him as if he’d just torn her heart out.

“Claudia,” my father barked out, and I jumped. “Deal with this and get her out of the house. She’s causing a scene.”

I looked at Amara with eyes that felt like damn saucers, confusion filling me. I licked my lips and went over to Francesca.

I stopped in front of her and instantly could smell the alcohol on her. She sobbed, fat tears coming from her red, swollen eyes and sliding down her pink cheeks.

“Francesca… are you drunk?” I whispered and took her hand. She wasn’t even looking at me, but staring over my shoulder and back at the sitting room. “What’s wrong? You can talk to me.”

She hiccupped but still didn’t speak. I gave her hand a squeeze and sensed someone come to stand beside me. Amara’s expression was one of empathy as she stared at Francesca.

“Francesca?” Amara said in a gentle voice, and I took a step back, giving my sister room.

For a long moment Francesca just stared off at nothing. She had to be in shock, but then she blinked rapidly and sniffed, wiping her cheeks and straightening her shoulders.

“I’m sorry. I’m a mess. I just… I felt so out of control. I walked out of my house and didn’t realize I was here until I was knocking on the door.”

She wiped away a few more errant tears again.

Amara glanced over at me, where I still stood several feet back, and then at the sitting room, where everyone else was.

“I’m sorry if my father said something that upset you further. He’s… well, he’s like all the men in our lives.” Amara’s expression was kind and soft.

But my heart started beating harder, and this tingling spread over my skin at the way Francesca stared at Amara with narrowed eyes and an expression of pure hatred.

Francesca didn’t speak, just kept looking at Amara as if she were the worst thing created. Gone was the girl who appeared to have a broken heart, and in her place was one who appeared to have not even one.

I took a step closer.

“Look at you,” Francesca sneered. “Got everything you wanted. A marriage where your husband clearly treats you well.” She pursed her lips. “The way I’ve seen him look at you…” She shook her head. “A man who would level anything or anyone who tried to hurt you. He’d never toss you away.”

What in the hell is going on?

“Is everything okay?” Amara’s brows were furrowed. She lifted her hand and placed it over her heart.

“This is all your fault. It has been from the very beginning.”

“I’m sorry about what happened to Edoardo.”

I felt my brows lift to my hairline. God, was this what it was all about? Did Francesca blame Amara for Edoardo’s death? *Oh God.* That had to be it.

“It was a ‘wrong place at the wrong time’ kind of thing. I know how hard this must be for you, especially since you can’t tell anyone about your relationship or how you felt about him.” Amara’s voice was still so soft but filled with so much sympathy.

Francesca slowly shook her head. “Edoardo?” She chuckled humorlessly again. “You think this is about *him*?”

“I—” Amara looked even more confused.

“No, this is about how *you* ruined everything.” Francesca’s voice was high-pitched. “Do you think these tears are for Edoardo? Stupid bitch. No, I’m not crying because he died. I’m crying because Marco found out what I was doing behind his back with that low-life foot soldier.”

My body tensed, my eyes widened, and I swore my heart stopped beating.

What did my father have to do with this? I looked toward the sitting room again to where Marco stood. He spoke with Nikolai, but the longer I stared at the man who I shared half my DNA with, the more my thoughts started turning.

“I don’t understand,” Amara said, and I snapped my attention toward my sister. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. You were afraid my father would find out about you and Edoardo? Why would he care?” She held her hands out, palms up, shaking her head.

“Are you really that dense? You don’t see the truth here?” Francesca took a small step toward Amara, and it felt like everything started rolling in slow motion. “*Really* think about it, Amara. Really think about what I’m telling you right now.” She gave a humorless laugh and shook her head. “I have nothing now. Nothing to lose. I don’t care who knows the truth.”

Francesca’s crazed eyes were almost pleading for the truth—whatever that might be—to be revealed. I replayed her words repeatedly, and although things started sliding into place, I didn’t want to accept the reality that I’d come to.

Father. Francesca. Together.

“You and my father?” The tone in which Amara said it must have spoken volumes because Francesca gave me a hard, tight-lipped smile in response.

“Since I was sixteen. You wouldn’t believe how hard it was at first. He’s not a gentle man, as I’m sure you would know being his daughter. But over the last two years, I grew to love him.” The smile she sported now was as if she were recalling a time that made her happy, and her gaze was latched on to something over Amara’s shoulder.

No, not something but someone.

Marco.

“You’ve been sleeping with my father since you were sixteen? I—”

“Don’t believe me? I don’t really care. He wants nothing to do with me now. He found out about Edoardo. Blames me for the death and how the situation has gone from bad to worse between him and the Russians.” Her expression hardened.

Pure hatred on her face was directed right at Amara.

“He wants nothing to do with me. He just threw me away as if what we shared the past two years meant nothing.” Francesca started crying again. “I thought he loved me,” she whispered.

Amara was shaking her head, and her expression was probably the same as mine—disbelief and shock.

“But if you loved my father, why were you with Edoardo?”

Francesca’s gaze was crazy and cold. “Edoardo found out about me and Marco, threatened to ruin my reputation and the reputation of my family. I couldn’t let that happen. I couldn’t let Marco know. I knew I’d lose him if he found out. He’d kill Edoardo if I told him. And Edoardo told me he had contingencies in place if anything happened to him—things that would ruin everything. Everything.” Her voice was rising even more now. “Edoardo wanted to rise in rank, wanted me to get him in good with my father. He used me like every person in my life has.”

I covered my mouth with a hand, feeling my eyes widen and my heart race a painful tempo.

“He made me do things with him. Do things *to* him. I didn’t have a choice. I refused to have him ruin everything. My life, Marco’s, my family.”

“You came here tonight to convince my father to stay with you?”

Her tears were almost violent as they streamed down her cheeks. “I’ve been hanging out with Claudia, hoping to talk to him, to make him see I love him and only him.”

Oh God. She’d been coming here and using me to see my father? I felt sick, my stomach roiling in disgust and horror.

“He avoids me at all costs. But I kept trying. And nothing was working. And now it’s over.” She shook her head. “If he thought Edoardo’s death was a mess that I helped cause, I’m going to make a bigger one. Because I have nothing else to lose now.”

I watched as Amara shook her head and took a step back. Something rolled inside of me, and I felt sick as I looked at Francesca and saw pure evil cross her face.

I took a step forward, not sure what I was going to do, not sure what Francesca was going to do, but time seemed to stand still.

Francesca reached inside her bulky jacket, and when she pulled her hand back out, the light in the foyer glinted against the metal of the gun she held.

Blood rushed through my ears, drowning everything else out. I wanted to charge Francesca, tackle the bitch to the ground, and get her away from Amara. But the rational part said to tread lightly. Francesca was a live wire, disconnected.

“No. You can put that away. You don’t have to do that.”

“He doesn’t want me,” Francesca screamed. “He doesn't want to even see if the baby is his. He said even if it was, it’s nothing but a bastard.” Francesca squeezed her eyes shut.

I felt everyone around me still, knew my father and mother, Nikolai, knew what was happening. There’s no way no one in the house didn’t feel and hear the chaos.

Holy fucking shit. Francesca was pregnant… with my father’s baby?

“Put that away before you hurt yourself, you foolish girl.” Father’s voice was rough and hard, scolding as if she were nothing but a child instead of a young woman he’d been having a disgusting, illicit relationship with.

The *girl* he’d been sleeping with since she was only sixteen.

I covered my mouth with a hand, feeling like I might throw up.

“You said you’d take care of me. You said I was the only one.”

“Francesca,” my father snapped out. “Put the fucking gun away.”

Francesca shook her head vigorously, the tears falling so fast and heavy that I knew she couldn't see clearly.

“How about we all just take a breath?” It was Nikolai who spoke, and even though he sounded calm and collected, there was this dark note laced in it.

I took another small step closer but stopped myself when Francesca pointed the gun right at Amara but spoke to Marco.

“You kept me on the side. You told me you’d leave her. You told me we’d be together.” Francesca placed a hand on her belly, and I heard my mother gasp.

“Maybe I should take away something you care about.” Francesca’s voice rose but shook, rising in volume until she was screaming. “Tell them,” she shouted at Marco. “Tell them you want me to get rid of the baby, even if it is yours.”

“You’re acting like a dramatic child.” My father’s voice was cold and dangerous. “And you’re making a scene.”

“Fuck making a scene,” Francesca screamed. “I’m going to take from you what you hold important. I’m going to force your hand in life like you’re doing with mine. Fuck you, Marco.”

I held my breath when Francesca shifted her body, her arms swinging out so the gun was pointed off to the side.

I heard screaming as the next sequence of events happened in slow motion. Francesca swung her focus on me, pointed the gun at the center of my chest, but what I felt was this calm settle over me.

If I could save Amara, this had to happen. Francesca could only get one shot off before she was taken out.

And then I was screaming as Amara charged toward Francesca. They fell to the ground at the same time the sound of a shot rang out.

A man roared. Nikolai.

Francesca and Amara struggled, and I darted toward them but suddenly was pulled away and tossed aside. Nikolai shoved me out of the way.

One more shot went off, and both women froze.

We all did.

Nikolai was pushing Francesca away and cradling Amara as she lay on the tile, keeping her to his body. His mouth was moving, but I couldn’t hear anything but the pounding of my heart in my ears and the rush of blood through my veins.

Oh God… she was so still, so pale. Nikolai shouted orders as people rushed into action.

There was so much blood.

I was frozen, cold, unable to move or breathe.

My sister was going to die.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 6

CLAUDIA

I dipped the rag into the bowl of warm water, ringing it out, and smoothed it over Amara's brow.

My heart was pounding when I saw a slight reaction in my sister's face. It was just a furrowing of her brow, but I felt this immense relief.

I held my breath when she slowly opened her eyes. "Hey, you," I said softly and ran the rag over her temple and down her cheek, wiping away the sweat I knew had to be making her feel sticky. "You scared the hell out of us."

I got the rag wet again and swept it over her forehead again.

"Gio arrived late last night. He's freaking out, of course. Going all beast mode on everyone, threatening to kill anyone who gets too close to you—"

"You're okay." Amara cut me off and lifted her arm, touching my thigh. "I thought… God, Claudia, I thought you were going to get shot."

I smiled as I shook my head, knowing I had to keep her at ease and relaxed, but I knew it didn't reach my eyes. "I'm fine. I'm fine." I wiped away the errant tear that slid down my cheek.

"And it's because you saved me, even if it was dumb and crazy, and I hate you for getting hurt because of it. But…" I looked away.

"But what?" She tried to sit up, and when she gasped in pain, my fear rose again.

"Hey, hey, hey," I whispered. "Stay put. You're going to ruin the work the doctor did and then that'll piss off Nikolai, and he'll either kill someone or kick Gio's ass again." I chuckled and shook my head when I saw the confusion on Amara's face. "When Gio first arrived, he strode in here like his ass was on fire. You woke up, but you were out of it. You started

thrashing on the bed. Nikolai dragged him out by his throat, kicked his ass in the hallway, and told him the next time he hurt you—even inadvertently—he'd put a bullet in each of his kneecaps."

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at the display of toxic masculinity.

"Men."

"Tell me," she said in a tight voice.

I couldn't stop the long exhale that spilled from me. I tossed the rag in the small bowl on the bedside table and looked at my big sister again. "Francesca shot off three rounds. One of them hit you in the side, but thankfully Nikolai acted fast and got a Russian doctor here. He was covered in your blood."

I'd wanted to take her to the hospital, but even I knew that gunshot wounds would bring a slew of police involvement. And when Nikolai said she'd be taken care of—he'd make sure of it—and that the bullet had gone straight through, most likely not hitting anything vital, I'd put all my trust in the big, scary Russian.

I smoothed a stray piece of dark hair off Amara's pale forehead.

"Nikolai kept pressure on the wound and was the only one not freaking out. As long as there isn't an infection and you don't strain yourself, the doctor said you'll make a full recovery."

She closed my eyes. "But?" My sister was smart. She knew there was more.

"The first bullet hit Father, and the last got Francesca." I waited a second, gauging Amara's expression. "She's dead, too."

"Father is dead." Amara's voice was low.

I looked down at my hands, my fingers twisted together in my lap. "Is it bad that I feel nothing?"

"Oh, Claudia." She reached out and tightened her fingers around my thigh until I glanced up at her. "I feel nothing, either. In fact," she said harshly, "I'm glad he's gone." She closed her eyes and breathed through her nose slowly. "He was a bastard. Cruel and heartless and deserved what he got. Francesca was lost… lost in her grief over her love for a piece of shit who could never give her the love she deserved."

A long moment of silence stretched out.

"How is Mother?"

I sighed. "She's fine. Shaken up, but I'm pretty sure it's not because she saw Father bleed out in the foyer." I gave a humorous laugh and shook my

head. “I’m sure she’s trying to process everything that Francesca told her. Although you and I both know he was no saint and obviously didn’t take his marriage vows seriously.” I ran a hand over my face. God, I was tired. “I can’t believe he was having an affair with Francesca, of all people, and when they started, she was so young.” I couldn’t stop the disgust from filling me. “And the baby, Amara.” I looked at her. “She was pregnant. Possibly with Father’s baby—”

“Hey, let’s not think about any of that. Because it doesn’t matter. What’s done is done.”

“He could have survived,” I whispered.

“What do you mean?”

I looked at the closed bedroom door. “Father. He might have survived the gunshot. He wasn’t dead.” My voice was so low I knew only Amara could hear me. “But Nikolai wouldn’t let the doctor he brought in help. Nikolai demanded he only focus on you and told everyone to stay where they were. No one—not the staff, not us—were to call anyone for help. He said he’d take care of everything.”

I bit my lip, worrying the flesh until it stung.

“And as the doctor was working on you, Nikolai had the coldest look on his face as he stared at Father bleeding out all over the tile. Mother was crying and kneeling beside him, but she wouldn’t touch him, just kept shaking her head and staring at where Francesca lay dead.”

When I heard Amara’s voice hiccup, I reached out and took her hand in mine.

“Oh hey, I didn’t tell you to upset you, Amara. Calm down. Calm down. It’s okay.” I pulled the blanket up to her chest.

“You need to rest. I can tell you’ve probably been up since all this happened.”

When she gave me a hard look, one I’d seen many times because my bigger sister was always looking out for me, I nodded.

“How long have I been out, anyway?”

“Three days. But now that you’re up and talking and look relatively well, I feel like I could probably sleep for a month.”

She smiled, but it looked so weak. I stared at where the IV was in the crook of her arm. The blood they’d given her before was now replaced with fluids and pain medicine. “Besides, Nikolai asked—” I couldn't help but snort and roll my eyes. “Demanded, more like it, that I let him know the

moment you were up. He’s been pacing this bedroom the entire time you were unconscious. The only reason he’s not here right now is because his brother flew in from New York, and he and Nikolai are speaking with Gio in the study. Now that Father is gone, Gio has taken up being the head of the family. I’m sure they have to get their houses in order and what this all means for the organizations.”

I brought our conjoined hands to my lips and gave her fingers a kiss before rising. Her eyes started drifting shut before she fell asleep. I let myself out and heard deep murmurs.

I followed the sound to the end of the hall. Nikolai stood tense beside Dmitry. They had their heads lowered as they whispered. As if they sensed me, Nikolai snapped his head in my direction.

He had this crazed look in his eyes and a set of dark circles under them from not sleeping. He’d refused to until Amara woke and he knew she’d be okay.

“She’s up, but just fell back asleep.”

He said a couple of words to his brother before hauling ass to the bedroom. When I heard the door shut softly behind him, there was a heavy silence that grew as I stood there, staring at Dmitry.

He said nothing but inclined his head in a way that spoke more words than he could have ever uttered verbally.

Feeling weird in my skin, I hurried away from him and found Gio in our father’s office. He was pacing, his cell pressed to his ear as he barked out orders in Italian to whomever was on the other end.

My brother hadn’t sensed me enter, and I stood still and silent as he disconnected the call, tossed the phone onto the desk, and cursed out loud. He walked to the bar, started pouring himself a Scotch, and then cursed again and just lifted the bottle straight to his mouth.

“Gio,” I said softly and watched as his back straightened, his muscles tensing under the black, long-sleeved button-up he wore.

He took another swig before he turned to look at me. He scanned me from head to toe, clearly examining me for injuries. Not like he’d see any, even if I had them on the outside. I wore sweats and a sweater so baggy I swam in them.

I opened my mouth, but before I could utter a word, he strode toward me and pulled me into a painful bear hug.

“*Sorellina*,” he said in a harsh voice. “Are you okay?”

I nodded. “I’m fine. My brain is just a little screwed up, but Amara woke up and seems like she’ll be fine, so everything will be okay.” That’s what I told myself, anyway.

His enormous body shook, and he exhaled as if he had an immense weight off his shoulders.

“Mother is like a fucking zombie.” He pulled away and ran a hand over his hair, mussing the short, dark strands. “Just keeps tossing back glasses of wine and murmuring Father's name like he was a fucking saint sacrificed.” He said something harsh and unintelligible and went back to the scotch.

“Will everything be okay?” Hearing Gio say the words would go a long way in making me feel better, even if he had to lie to me.

He didn’t answer right away, but after a long moment he turned to face me. “I’ll make sure everything is okay. Don’t worry, *sorellina*. The nightmare of Father’s rule is fucking over.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 7

CLAUDIA

My father’s death had been deemed a horrible crime, a murder caused by Francesca.

But we knew the truth. All of us did.

But no one spoke about *that*.

The rumors had shifted to paint Francesca as a girl obsessed with a powerful man. When he refused her advances, she lied about her pregnancy being Marco’s when, in fact, she’d gotten knocked up by Edoardo.

That couldn't have been further from the truth.

I closed my eyes and shook my head to clear my thoughts.

I didn’t care that Marco was being lowered into the dirt to rot. I didn’t care that my mother was dressed all in black, a veil covering her face as she sobbed, all but throwing herself on the casket.

She was embarrassing herself. Didn’t she remember that the man she called *husband* did nothing but beat and degrade her?

And here she was sobbing like she’d lost the greatest love of her life.

It infuriated me, and I curled my hands into fists so hard my nails dug into my palms.

I welcomed the pain. It reminded me I was stronger than this bullshit. So I stood next to my mother silently and kept my head down.

Around me, people probably thought I was a grieving daughter. But in reality all I could think about was going back home, making sure Amara was truly going to be okay, and trying to put all of this behind me.

I felt a tingling on the back of my neck and lifted my hand to rub my nape as I glanced up and looked around.

Men and women garbed in black surrounded the plot, so many people that it was hard to see past the sea of bodies.

I could see paparazzi and several news stations just over the hill, trying to get the money shot of Marco Bianchi, *Cosa Nostra* capo, being put to rest.

There were a few people glancing at me, some with sympathy in their eyes, others with curiosity. But most looked right through me.

Then there were the ones who were eyeing me as if I could be used, plucked from my mother's grasp, and degraded because they needed a fresh young wife.

I was about to face forward once again when a dark figure at the top of the hill caught my attention. He was too far away for me to make out any distinguishable features, but I just *knew* it was Dmitry.

And I couldn't look away. I knew he wasn't here to pay his condolences. It was strange that I had a feeling he attended my father's funeral only because he got sadistic pleasure in knowing Marco Bianchi was dead.

I couldn't lie and say I didn't feel the same way.

I shivered and wrapped my arms around my body.

And the entire time, I felt Dmitry's presence like a dark cloud that made me even more curious about who the Russian really was.

He brought his hand to his mouth, and a second later a cloud of smoke dissipated in front of him as he exhaled.

I wanted to thank him for protecting me from my father, to confide in him that no one else but Amara and Gio had ever done anything like that for me.

A stranger looking out for a young girl going against not only her father but a capo in the *Cosa Nostra*.

But all I did was give him one last lingering look and face forward again, knowing that men like Dmitry, like Nikolai, hell, like my father and brother, were no good for any women. They were too controlling, dominating, and knew only one way. Theirs.

But still… I did like to wonder what it would be like to have somebody who truly cared about me.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 8

CLAUDIA

Given the fact that I'd lost a parent and my other one was in some kind of comatose state where she refused to speak to anyone and moved around like she was a zombie, I was feeling pretty good.

Weeks had passed since Marco had been killed. There had been a tremendous shift in power, with Gio stepping into our father's shoes.

I would have thought Mother would have been happy she was rid of her abusive husband, but she wandered aimlessly as if lost.

Although I'd wanted to stay with Amara, be right at her side as she healed, everyone decided it was best to let her heal in Desolation with Nikolai watching over her.

Or should I say, Nikolai—her overprotective husband—had wanted no one close to her while she recuperated.

Understandable, since we could have lost her in the blink of an eye.

Besides, there'd been an enormous shift in the *Cosa Nostra*, and the power dynamic within our own family had shifted drastically because Gio had now settled into his new role as head of the house.

So there hadn't been a lot of free time in the Bianchi household for me to whine and beg to go to New York.

I glanced over at Amadeo, who sat in the passenger seat beside me in the back of the car Amara and Nikolai had sent for us.

We'd been picked up at the private airstrip by one of Nikolai's foot soldiers and were currently en route to Amara's house.

The men didn't speak, and there was this oppressive silence and heaviness that filled the interior of the car. I could see the driver continuously glancing in the rearview mirror at Amadeo.

I could feel how much the Russians and Italians hated each other, as if they were the Montagues and Capulets.

One wrong move and they were both going to draw their guns and demand a duel at sunset.

I looked out the back passenger window and watched the city of Desolation rush by.

Amara had warned me ahead of time that Desolation was a cesspool, a basic dumpster fire that her husband controlled.

But soon we were leaving Desolation and driving through a more upscale area of New York.

Five minutes later the car pulled into an underground garage and stopped in front of a pair of silver elevator doors.

Luxury vehicles in every color and shape filled the garage, and I could only assume they were Nikolai's.

Once we were out and Amadeo had my bags in hand, the Bratva soldier led us to the elevator. He punched in a code, stepped aside as the doors opened, and gestured for us to enter.

And then we were stepping inside alone, and the doors were closing.

I pressed myself against the corner of the elevator, and Amadeo stayed on the other side. His hands were clasped behind his back, his shoulders pulled back, his focus straight ahead.

I could see the outline of his gun under his jacket and knew he probably had a few more weapons hidden somewhere on his body.

I wasn't upset that Gio had made him come with me. It would be stupid for me to go anywhere unprotected, not with how many enemies my family had. I was young but not stupid.

Besides, I would have been fine if I had a handful of guards at my back as long as I could see my sister.

I just wished Amadeo was a little more friendly and a lot less stern, like he had a stick up his ass.

Although I didn't have a date to go back home in mind, I knew I couldn't stay here indefinitely.

My sister had her own life now. A new one with a husband. I didn't want to encroach on the newlyweds.

The elevator slowed to a stop and Amadeo tensed. He reached inside his jacket, and I knew he was curling his fingers around his gun, ready to draw and shoot. I placed my hand on his forearm just as the doors opened.

His brow was furrowed as he looked at where my hand rested, then back at my face.

I slowly shook my head and smiled. “*Non hai bisogno di un'arma. Questo non è quel tipo di visita*.” *You don’t need a weapon. This isn’t that kind of visit.*

He made a gruff sound in the back of his throat and, just as the elevator doors opened, murmured, “*È sempre quel tipo di visita quando i fottuti russi sono coinvolti*.” *It’s always that kind of visit where the fucking Russians are concerned.*

I knew men like him, every man in my life, were ready to put a bullet between someone’s eyes at the drop of a hat.

And then the doors were fully open, and I was staring at my sister, who had her hands clasped in front of her and a big grin on her face.

“*Sorellina*.” *Sister*.

Her husband stood right behind her, this towering beast of a man, all dark features, blazing blue eyes, and any exposed skin inked with frightening tattoos.

I was shocked again at how much the Petrov brothers resembled each other so much.

But whereas Dmitry was big and bulky, Nikolai seemed more lean cut. They both had the same cold, dangerous aura.

“Oh my God,” Amara whispered, and I launched myself at her, nearly tackling her to the ground. She stumbled back and Nikolai placed his hands on her shoulders, smoothing his fingers over her arms.

“Easy, *kukolka*.”

I hugged her tightly just as he gave her a kiss on the top of the head and moved over to stand beside her.

I could feel Amadeo right behind me, and although I knew there was probably some turbulent energy currently filtering throughout the room, all I could focus on was that I was finally here with my sister.

“It feels like it’s been an eternity since I’ve seen you.” It hadn’t been, of course. It had only been weeks, but time blended together to seem like a lifetime had already passed.

We pulled back at the same time and just stared at each other before laughing softly.

She slid her arm through the crook of mine and led me away from the front door and down the hall. It was then I noticed another dark, tall, and

imposing figure off to the side.

Dmitry leaned against the wall by the bar, staring at me with a gleam in his eyes before lifting a glass of liquor to his lips and shifting his focus to Amadeo, the clear mistrust of my bodyguard written on his face.

He slowly turned his head until he was looking at me before inclining his head. It was almost robotic, as if he couldn't be bothered to care one way or another about "Amara's baby sister."

But I felt a little thrill that he'd acknowledged me. God, I… was crushing on Dmitry.

"Gio actually made you bring Amadeo, huh?" Amara's voice was so low it was only meant for my ears.

I laughed softly and looked over my shoulder to see Amadeo only a couple of feet from me, a scowl on his face as he scanned the interior of the penthouse as if he were waiting for the Bratva to pounce out of the corners.

"Come on," Amara said softly as she led me down the hall and into the room I presumed was going to be mine while I stayed here. "Let's ignore the testosterone pissing contest."

Amadeo stepped inside, setting my bags on the floor before, I assumed, leaving, but only to stand in front of the open doorway.

I suppressed rolling my eyes. He was just doing his job, but I was pretty sure Nikolai and Dmitry weren't going to have a shoot-out right in their apartment.

Amara huffed out, clearly annoyed, and walked over to the door before closing it and giving us some privacy. Her smile slowly dimmed as seriousness took its place.

"How are you doing?"

I walked around the room, shrugging my answer.

The room was spacious, with a large window that reached from floor to ceiling and overlooked the cityscape. The bed was king-size and had a dark duvet and silver-accented pillows. The pictures were minimalistic, abstract paintings that looked more like splotches of paint than anything discernible.

There was a small bathroom to the side of the bed, and a dresser next to the main door.

"I'm fine," I finally said and turned to face her, my back to the window as I surveyed the entire room.

Amara was now sitting on the edge of the bed and patted the seat beside her. When I sat next to her, she wrapped her arm around my shoulder and

pulled me in. For a second we just leaned our heads against each other, the silence stretching on.

“How are you *really* doing?”

I knew what she meant.

We both might’ve hated our father, but after he was killed and then Amara was injured, and finally our mother going into some weird detached state, it felt like the scars of our past were just becoming deeper and more painful.

“I think I should be asking you that question.” I pulled back slightly so I could look at her face. Her long dark hair was piled up in a messy bun, and she was dressed in relaxing lounge clothes.

Her white shirt hung slightly off one shoulder, and her olive skin had a beautiful glow to it. She looked beautiful. *She looks happy.*

She was the one to shrug now, but she gave me a genuine smile. Knowing she was safe and okay and being taken care of made me feel like this weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Amara might be my older sister, but I worried about her.

“And you’re healing okay?”

She reached down and pulled up the bottom of her shirt. The area where she’d been shot was healing nicely, although she’d have a nasty mark.

“It’s like it never happened,” she whispered, but there was a tightness in her voice. I wrapped my arms around her and was now the one to hold *her*.

“How is Gio taking everything? The weight of the responsibility of being capo must be crippling.”

I thought about our older brother and how he’d taken on the reins of his new position. “He’s doing his role seamlessly. It’s kind of frightening how well, if I’m being honest.” I chewed on my lower lip. “He was born for the position.”

We were both silent as those words sank in, and I stared off at the closed bedroom door, thinking about how my brother was frighteningly skilled at being a leader. I didn’t know why it shocked me. He’d really been born and bred for this position.

But to see him so effortlessly take control, to watch men around him fall in line with no resistance, scared the hell out of me.

“He’s gone even more now than ever. And Mother is there, but not really. She’s worthless to talk to. Won’t even look in my direction. The staff brings her trays of food, but she barely eats.”

“She needs to talk to someone,” Amara finally said. “She’s been through a lot of trauma.”

I knew Amara was right. I knew I should be more forgiving, but when years go by of your mother watching you get abused and doing nothing, finding any kind of empathy was hard. Really hard, if not impossible. I didn't tell Amara that, though.

“And when Gio comes home, he’s covered in blood with cut and bruises on him.”

“He was Father’s weapon for so long, I don’t know if he can ever stop being brutal in that regard.”

I looked down at my hands and nodded, not knowing if Amara even saw me.

“I think he likes it, Amara. I think he loves the violence.” My voice was whisper-thin, as if I were afraid to even say the words out loud.

She was silent for so long I didn’t know if she’d answer. But then she whispered back, “I think you’re right.” Amara exhaled and made a soft sound in the back of her throat. “We knew he was capable of doing this.”

I said nothing, even though I agreed.

“I hate it. I hate the life we are in.” I shrugged. “It just sucks. Being alone, even though there are people around you.”

“My sweet *sorellina*.” She hugged me and I leaned against her.

“I miss you.”

“I miss you, too. You’re here now and it’s gonna be incredible. We’re going to have so much fun.”

“I wish Mother wasn’t the way she is. I wish she was better to you… for you. She could’ve been something great to us. My memories of when I was little told me that. But she was lost to us well before Father died.”

I stared down at my hands clasped in my lap.

“You can always come stay with me. I can talk to Gio—”

“No,” I said right away, shaking my head. “You have a life. You’re a newlywed, and I have a life back home. I can’t thrust myself into your happiness because I’m sad and lonely sometimes.”

“Stop,” she said with such firmness that I looked at her in shock. “You are always welcome here. Your happiness is mine. Your unhappiness is mine.” She cupped my cheek. Even though she was only three years older than me, she seemed so much older, so much wiser. “I love you.”

I smiled. “I love you, too, but I mean it. I’m fine where I’m at. I’m just bitching, and you’re the only one I can do it to.”

Amara chuckled softly. “Promise you’ll think about my offer, though? Promise you’ll come live with me if you can’t take it anymore?”

I nodded even though I’d never come to that point.

Finally Amara pushed off the bed, facing me. “I’m thrilled you’re here. I’ve missed you so much. Rest up before dinner. We’re going to just take it easy tonight, but tomorrow we’re going shopping.” Her grin was wide, and I couldn’t help smiling back.

When I was left alone again, I let myself fall back on the bed, my arms outstretched as I stared at the ceiling. I could hear deep, indistinct murmurs coming from the other side of the door. I closed my eyes as I pictured Dmitry out in the living room, still leaning against the wall, a glass of hard liquor in his hand.

He looked at me as if I were a fly on the wall. Inconsequential. Invisible. I groaned and covered my face with my hands. Of course he did. What exactly did I want? A grown man to look at me with anything more than indifference? I should be glad he wasn’t a pervert.

I didn’t know what it was about him. He was far too old for me to even be thinking about him in any way other than my sister’s brother-in-law, yet I was drawn to him.

I kept thinking about how he protected me. No one had done that before except Gio and Amara.

What I needed to do was put Dmitry in the back of my mind. He was no good for me. He was too dangerous. That should have been enough to have me blocking out anything and everything that had to do with him.

Yet I felt even more curiously drawn to the big Russian.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 9

CLAUDIA

I wasn't sure what woke me up first, but I rolled over in bed and stared out the window, the curtains partially pulled, the fading light of the night seeping in.

And this high up, with the soundproof windows, all I heard was silence.

I could make out the rising sun off in the horizon, oranges and pinks painting the sky. It was too early for me to be up for the day, especially with the time change.

I was about to close my eyes and see if I could get some more sleep when I heard a strange sound coming from behind the closed bedroom door.

I pushed myself up and stared at the door, hearing what sounded like heavy breathing, and then a whine, followed by scratching.

The hell?

After pushing off the blanket and padding over to it, I gripped the handle and cracked the door.

But it suddenly shoved open, and I stumbled back from the unexpected force. I fell on my ass and stared in shock as a big damn dog strode in.

I scrambled backward until the frame of the bed stopped my retreat, but the Doberman kept coming forward.

I opened my mouth to cry out for help. My throat felt tight and dry, frozen from fear. And so I squeezed my eyes shut and turned my head, expecting to be mauled.

But then I heard a deep rumble of words in Russian, and as the seconds ticked by and nothing happened, I cracked an eye open and looked back toward the open doorway.

The Doberman sat in front of me with its head cocked and its ears twitching. And behind her, standing in the doorway and leaning against the frame, a coffee cup in hand, was Dmitry.

He had an eyebrow cocked as he stared down at me. And then he clicked his tongue, and the dog whined before rising.

She took a step toward me and I tensed, but when she just butted her head against my hand, I darted a glance toward Dmitry.

“You’re scaring her, Sasha. Show her how gentle you are.”

I looked between him and the dog, then back to him again, pretty sure I’d been holding my breath this entire time.

“She wants you to pet her,” he said with an amused tone, the corner of his lips twitching as he brought the coffee cup to his mouth and took a pull from it.

I glanced back at the dog, and she whined again, rubbing her head against my hand until I tentatively lifted my fingers and ran them over the silky fur along her head.

She let me pet her for a few seconds before she turned and trotted back to Dmitry, sitting on her haunches beside him.

While still watching me, Dmitry ran his hand over her head, stroking the dog behind the ear. “She’s a gentle giant.”

I found that hard to believe. I could see her being vicious at the drop of a hat, maybe on her master’s command.

But right now, as she stared at me with clearly intelligent eyes, I felt some of the tension and fear leave me.

“I just…” My throat closed up as I pushed myself up, smoothing my hands down my sleep pants. “Dogs scare me. I was nearly bitten by one when I was a child. I guess it left a lasting impression on me.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I can see how that would fuck with someone’s mental well-being.”

I… wasn’t expecting him to say that, to sound genuine in that response.

“You’re an early riser.”

He spoke again before I could respond, but it was better that way, seeing as I’d probably put my foot in my mouth.

Dmitry took another drink from his coffee cup and kept stroking the dog's head. “I thought teenagers liked to sleep until like two in the afternoon or some shit?”

I cocked an eyebrow. “Did you sleep that late as a teenager?”

He chuckled. “My dad would have beat my ass if I slept past seven in the morning. Well, he beat my ass no matter what.”

Although he smiled, I felt like he wasn’t exaggerating.

I shook my head. “I don’t sleep in. I’ve always gotten up pretty early because of school, or if the tutors came over.” I pointedly looked at the dog again. “But I was planning to go back to bed until your scary-ass dog pushed her way into my room.”

Dmitry chuckled. “She was just curious. Probably smelled your perfume or your scent. It’s new to her, so she’s nosy as hell.”

I licked my lips and nodded. “Is Amadeo still sleeping?”

He grunted and gave a small incline to his head. “Why don’t you come into the kitchen? Nikolai cooked a huge breakfast for everyone. This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. My brother is actually cooking, so you might as well take advantage of it.”

With that, he turned and left, Sasha following close to his heel.

I just stood there for a moment, letting my body get all the adrenaline rush out of my system, making sure my heart rate was normal and that my palms weren’t sweaty anymore.

I went into the bathroom attached to the bedroom and used it, brushed my teeth and washed my face, then threw on a pair of sweats and an oversize sweater.

I could’ve just kept my pajamas on, but it felt grossly inappropriate wearing that stuff in front of Dmitry and Nikolai.

I left the bedroom and shut the door behind me and instantly smelled the scent of bacon, brewing coffee, and heard the clink of dishes.

There were low, masculine murmurs, and although I could make out their voices, they spoke Russian, so I couldn’t understand what they said.

And then I heard my sister’s soft laughter, and I felt myself exhale in relief.

Not that I was afraid of Dmitry or Nikolai, but I certainly didn’t want to sit and have breakfast with them alone. I was here because of Amara.

Around the corner, I saw my sister sitting on her husband’s lap.

They were at the circular dining room table right off the kitchen. Nikolai had an arm around her waist, his other hand curled around his coffee mug.

He whispered something in her ear, and she started laughing again, her cheeks tinged pink. I sure as hell didn’t want to know what he was telling

her.

Dmitry sat across from them, Sasha lying by his side. He said something in Russian and Nikolai shook his head, but he never took his focus off Amara. It was like he didn't want to, or maybe he couldn't.

Like she was the very air that he needed to survive. I'd never been jealous of my sister. I'd always been so happy for her, but the truth was I wanted that one day.

I wanted someone to look at me like they couldn't live without me. And maybe there was something wrong with me, but I wanted someone to kill to protect me, not because they were cruel and territorial but because they loved me so deeply the very thought of me hurting cut them deep, too.

God, I wanted that something fierce.

My foot caught on a creaky board, and all conversation stopped as three sets of eyes focused on me. Amara was off Nikolai's lap and striding toward me the next second, her smile big.

She wore a plush-looking robe with her initials stitched into the right breast pocket. When she wrapped her arms around me, I inhaled the lemony vanilla scent that clung to her.

"I am so glad you're here," my sister said softly and squeezed me tighter. "It's so nice waking up and seeing you."

I couldn't help but close my eyes and smile, squeezing her back tightly.

When she pulled away, her wedding ring snagged on my sweater. "Good God," I whispered as I took her hand and lifted it up, the kitchen light catching the massive diamond. "I don't remember it being this big."

I looked up at Amara and saw her cheeks turn pink. "Nikolai said the first one wasn't good enough. So he went out and had this one custom-made."

I glanced over at her husband, and of course he was just staring at Amara, this possessive glint in his eyes. I realized that look wasn't one of ownership but a pure, unadulterated love.

Well, as much as a dark antihero could love with a cold, brutal heart.

He cared for my sister on a level so deep it was ingrained in his very DNA.

I looked at the diamond again. The thing must weigh her hand down. "It's beautiful," I murmured and let her hand go.

She led me to the table, and I sat beside her, this time with her sitting in a chair instead of Nikolai's lap.

He started speaking with his brother, and Amara grabbed a plate, loading it with bacon and eggs, a piece of toast, hash browns, and placing it in front of me. She gave me a glass of orange juice and filled a bowl with freshly cut fruit.

It certainly was a spread, and far more than I'd be able to eat at one sitting. I was a little shocked that Nikolai had been the one to prepare it.

A man such as him, who looked the way he did, who ran a criminal empire, wasn't the first person I would think of who could make anything from scratch, let alone a spread like this.

I tuned them out as they kept speaking, and I placed a napkin in my lap, about to dig in. When I felt something cold and wet touch my hand, I glanced down to see Sasha sitting beside me, her ears twitching once more, her eyes locked on me, before she glanced at my plate.

I glanced at Dmitry, then at Amara. No one was paying attention to me, so I broke off some bacon and snuck her a little piece.

She greedily gobbled it down, licking her chops as she begged for more. I couldn't help but smile and scratch her behind the ear. When I straightened and faced forward again, about to get her another piece, I spied Dmitry leaning back in his chair, looking at me. The corner of his mouth lifted.

"I told you, she's a sweetheart. She already has you hooked, so you're sneaking food from the table."

I ran my hand over Sasha's head and looked back down at her. "She is a good girl," I whispered. "But I bet she's fiercely loyal."

"She is."

I glanced at Dmitry again, and he was looking at his dog. "She'll rip a man's throat out if they so much as threaten you. And then afterward she'll lay on the couch and want to snuggle."

I nearly choked on my orange juice at hearing Dimitri talk about violence and then snuggling. That certainly wasn't a word I would've ever thought I'd hear come out of a Bratva leader.

"I was thinking we could go shopping today?" Amara asked, pulling me from my thoughts. "I'm obviously not going to show you Desolation, because there's not much to see aside from a cesspool, but right outside of the city, it's gorgeous."

As if the very mention of me going somewhere triggered Amadeo, he came walking into the kitchen, his hair disheveled and his face showing

sleep.

He narrowed his eyes as he looked at Dmitry and then Nikolai. “I need a room closer to Claudia. You’ve put me two doors down and the walls are too thick, muting everything.”

Amadeo glowered, clearly annoyed. I knew he’d report this back to Gio.

“We’re in my sister's house, Amadeo.” He cut a glance at me, still wearing that pinched expression. “If it’s not safe *here*, then it’s not safe anywhere.”

Amadeo grunted and ran a hand over his face.

“You can relax. I’d never let anything happen to Amara.” Nikolai’s voice was calm and collected, but there was still a bite in it I realized was just… him. “I, as well as any man working for me, will protect her with our lives.”

Amara gave Amadeo a sweet smile. “Why don’t you go take a shower and clean up? I’ll keep a plate warm for you. And we're shopping today, so wear comfortable shoes.”

I held in my laughter.

With a huff of irritation, Amadeo turned and stalked away from us, disappearing around the corner and down the hall.

Moments later I heard the shower turn on. And I guess that’s how the day was going to start, with a grumpy-ass security guard who would tattle on me for every little thing that happened on this trip.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 10

CLAUDIA

The day had been incredible, and I'd forgotten how wonderful it was just to spend time with Amara.

Although it had been rare when the two of us could actually have fun, the times we did were some of my most memorable in life.

I wished the day would have lasted forever, but we were back at Amara's penthouse, all of us sitting around their large dining room table and a slew of take-out boxes covering the top.

I found out Dmitry had a sense of humor, albeit it was slightly dark. He liked to keep things easygoing. And although I got the same kind of vibe from Nikolai, Dmitry was more highbrow in the things he said.

Amara's husband just seemed flat-out crazy, even if the people around laughed at what he said. But I almost thought those nervous laughs and forced grins were because they didn't know if this guy was about to pull a gun and blow their brains out or clap them on the shoulder and ask if they wanted a shot of whiskey.

Amadeo sat next to me and had been quiet most of the day, but would respond in one-word responses when spoken to. His hatred for the Russians was clear and uncomfortable and made the entire situation tense. But I refused to let his prejudices ruin my time.

So I just ignored him, pretending he was nothing but my shadow, and after a while I found this easy routine.

"We should do something fun tomorrow," Amara said, and I lifted my brows.

"Wasn't that what today was?"

She waved off what I said, but she had a smile on her face. “That was retail therapy. I do that every other week.” She cut a sly glance to Nikolai.

He grunted. “And my credit cards are proof of that.” I could hear the affection in his voice. It was clear this man would go bankrupt if it meant his wife would be happy.

Although being the leader of the Bratva meant he most definitely would not be hurting for money in his lifetime.

She shrugged and picked at her noodles. “I mean, when my husband gives me a credit card with no limit and tells me to do my worst, I have to accept the challenge.” He slowly grinned and gave her a wink. “Besides, what else am I supposed to do?”

Those words died on her lips when Nikolai made the most animalistic sound I’d ever heard. You could’ve heard a pin drop for how quiet everything became. I saw Amara’s cheeks turn pink and then felt my embarrassment rise. I knew that look he gave her. It was one of primal desire.

“Nikolai,” she hissed, but there was no heat in her words. “My sister is here. Quit being a pig.”

He chuckled softly.

I cut a glance at Amara, and could see that although she was being stern with him, the possessive glint in his eyes also influenced her.

“I feel like I’ve been on my best behavior,” he said in a lazy tone and leaned back, picking up his beer and drinking it as he stared at her. “I haven’t killed anyone today. I haven’t gotten into any fights with douchebags looking at you when we went shopping.” He shrugged and took another drink before he set the bottle on the table. Then he looked at Dmitry. “For all intents and purposes, I feel like I’ve been a fucking saint. Wouldn’t you agree, Dmitry?”

Dmitry held his hands up and shook his head. “No fucking way are you dragging me into this. You dig your own grave, brother.” He lifted his coffee cup and took a drink before making a face of disgust. “Also, get a decent machine. The shit that comes out of that tastes like ass water.”

Nikolai snorted. “You and your bougie as hell drinks. You some kind of coffee connoisseur now?”

“No,” Dmitry deadpanned. “I just don’t like shit coffee.”

Nikolai shrugged. “Amara and I don’t drink that shit regularly. I bought the damn machine so you’d quit bitching when you came here.”

Amadeo made a disgruntled noise in the back of his throat.

“Can you please act like being here isn’t the seventh level of hell?” I whispered. “You’ve been miserable this entire time. It can’t possibly be that bad.”

Nikolai and Dmitry started talking again, thankfully their voices masking my whispers to Amadeo.

He opened his mouth, but then I realized I shouldn’t have asked him anything. “You know what?” I whispered and slashed my hand between us. “Don’t answer that.”

I stared at Dmitry, knowing it was all kinds of wrong to have any kind of attraction toward him. He was so much older than me. He was dangerous, a man that any sane woman wouldn’t get involved with.

He never saw me as anything more than Amara’s little sister, but I just kept feeling this connection with him growing, as if it was this knot that was slowly being pulled tighter and tighter.

A cell phone rang, and he pulled it out of his coat pocket. When he saw who it was, he stood, excusing himself as he went into the living room. I glanced over my shoulder to stare at him, knowing I shouldn’t try to eavesdrop, but he was just so mysterious it had my curiosity growing.

After a few seconds he disconnected the call, said something to himself low and harsh, then turned to look at Nikolai.

“I have work to do. Big fight tonight.” Dmitry lowered his voice and switched to Russian as he and Nikolai moved toward the door.

I watched them curiously, having been around enough men in my life who broke the law to tell things were shifty just by their body language.

And what Dmitry and Nikolai were throwing off told me they weren’t talking about anything legal.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 11

DMITRY

The underground level beneath the Butcher and Son slaughterhouse was packed with the most degenerate human beings on the planet.

I stood at the top landing, the rickety-as-fuck railing ten seconds away from giving out for how rusty and old it was.

I was glad I'd gone with this site for tonight's fight instead of one of the other warehouses we'd previously held them in.

Butcher and Son was bigger, and although it stunk like age and rot, the memory of dead animals, and blood staining the walls and ground, it was a perfect place for a fight to the death.

And that's exactly what this match would be. *D'yavol*, "The Devil," my newest fighter, was a savage motherfucker. I needed someone top-tier to replace *Razoreniye*, Kostya "Ruin" Morozov.

Once Ruin decided he wanted out—of course, because of a woman and losing his heart to her—I knew I needed to find someone as equally brutal as he'd been.

I wasn't sure I'd find a man to live up to that.

Ruin had been taken as a young teen by the Bratva. He'd been trained at a very early age to be a fighter. To be a weapon.

It's what he was, what was ingrained in his DNA. He hadn't known any different. Or at least I hadn't thought he knew anything besides brutality. And when he found Anastasia again, ten years after being taken away, he said fuck everything else.

I had to give the asshole props for going after what he wanted, but he put me in a precariously tight situation.

With fights already lined up and the very prospect of revenue being lost because the bastard had given everyone all but the middle finger, *D'yavol* “The Devil” had walked into my life.

I needed a fighter.

He’d needed an outlet.

And fuck, had he given me exactly what I wanted? If *D'yavol* wanted to be a fucking monster, I’d throw him in the cage with poor bastard after poor bastard to sate his bloodlust.

And I'd never seen a man so ruthless.

I looked at the newly erected cage in the center of the room. There was wire all around it and a locked door, the only exit to keep the fighters inside. More than once, we’d had one try to escape from the brutality of *D'yavol*.

But the bastards knew what they were getting into when they signed up to join. The payout for winning was too much of an incentive. You either won or you died.

The mat was a rusty color, splotches of blood dried into the flooring. Spotlights were beaming from the center, giving all spectators a prime view at every angle.

My guys looked up at me, and I inclined my head, letting them know without saying the words that everything looked good.

I lifted my hand and moved it around in a circle, telling them to get this shit started.

A sudden hush fell over the room, and this nervous energy had the hairs on my arm standing on end.

I felt the adrenaline, excitement.

And then people were scurrying back, making a path for the star of the event. I straightened when I saw *D'yavol* making his way toward the cage.

He was a big motherfucker covered in tattoos from wrist to neck, his entire chest, his back, and even his legs. His hair was short and dark, haphazardly disheveled around his head, as if he didn’t give a shit about his appearance.

And he wore his telltale mask, something he donned before every fight. The terrifying visage of a skull that covered his face wasn’t even the most frightening aspect of him.

He just had this aura around him that told the very basic nature of a human that this was a predator. I felt it the first time I met him and embraced it when I saw him fight.

There wasn’t anyone who’d ever made me feel that kind of tension in the air, as if it crackled around us.

There were bookies at every corner of the room, trading off money, taking down stats and wagers.

I already knew who was going to win, not because it was rigged, although there were plenty of those that I controlled, but because nobody ever lost against him.

When he hopped into the cage, there was a roar of noise, arms being thrown in the air, spectators thirsty for spilled blood.

His opponent stepped into the cage, and a round of boos peppered the crowd. Plenty of people bet against *D'yavol.* They were all hoping that one of these times he’d lose, making them richer than fuck because of it.

I watched as the two men went at it. And although *D'yavol* was a fucking beast, bulky, muscular, and tall as hell, he was fast.

He played with the other fighter for a moment, dodging and ducking, letting the other man think he’d clip him, and right at the last second D’yavol moved, throwing a fist to his kidney, an uppercut to his jaw.

He only let his opponents get one hit per fight, as if that pain bloomed inside of him and awoke the beast that he was.

Round after round, he annihilated the fighter until finally the other man lay broken on the ground. Sweat and blood covered *D'yavol.* His chest pumped up and down as he breathed hard, and the fucking crowd was in utter pandemonium.

I’d made my way down to the lower level as soon as the fight started, checked on the bookies, and went over the bets.

The house was set to make good fucking change tonight.

I made my way over to the cage just as *D'yavol* climbed down. He didn’t give two shits about the corpse he’d just delivered to the spectators. The guy was a fucking brutal beast.

He was certainly living up to his name, that was for fucking sure.

I looked over to where all the bookies were huddled. I was about to turn back around to *D'yavol* when I caught shifty fucking eyes from two of my men. They were off to the side, heads bent low as they spoke, their mouths moving quickly, their eyes staring toward the main entrance of the underground.

Instantly my hackles rose, and instinct told me shit wasn’t right.

I was about to take a step toward them and see what the hell was going on when suddenly they hauled ass in the other direction, toward one of the back entrances.

That was when all hell broke loose.

I looked at the main entrance just as the metal door flung open, SWAT member after SWAT member filing in. Their guns were raised as they swept the room and shouted orders. The crowd went fucking crazy, running in all different directions, pushing and shoving to flee.

I looked over at *D'yavol*, who stood staring at the police filing in. Although I couldn't see the lower part of his face because of the mask, his brows were low, and pure, unadulterated hatred spewed from him.

He lifted both of his arms, his knuckles bloody and torn open from beating the shit out of the other man, his chest covered in splatters of blood and mixing with his tattoos. He gave the cops both middle fingers.

He looked at me, his eyes creasing at the corners as he clearly grinned, and then he turned and left. He shoved people out of the way so violently they were tossed to the ground, trampled on by the chaos.

It was a straight-up clusterfuck, and being in the center of the room meant I was locked deep in a sea of bodies, all trying to do the same thing.

Save their own fucking necks.

I looked down, saw pinpoint red lights centered on my chest, and sighed, lifting my hands.

"Fuck."

"Hands in the air, asshole."

Well, shit.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 12

CLAUDIA

"Fuck."

I bolted up in bed, that lone curse word having been shouted so loudly it jolted me from a restless sleep.

I could hear deep voices through the walls but couldn't make out what was said. A second later there was a hard pounding on my door. I pulled the blanket up to my chin just as it was pushed open and Amadeo strode in.

"What's going on?"

He had his hand at his side, and I knew he was seconds away from pulling his gun out.

"Amadeo," I snapped in a panicked voice, and he stopped to look at me. "What is going on?"

More voices were growing louder, and I pushed the blankets off and threw on the same oversize sweater and sweats that I'd worn the previous morning at breakfast.

"Things went down with the Bratva. There was a raid on one of their businesses." Amadeo ran his hand over his hair, looking stressed. He pulled his cell phone out and started punching a number.

I knew he was calling Gio. I also knew there was more than he was telling me. I'd been around the mafia my entire life, and a simple raid wasn't going to cause this much chaos.

I wrapped my arms around myself, wanting to go check on Amara, but Amadeo was blocking the door.

When he clearly couldn't get ahold of Gio, he growled low and punched in another number. After a second he started speaking rapid Italian while pacing the length of the room.

It was when he was several feet from the door that I started forward and opened it, tearing off toward where the voices were coming from and hearing Amadeo shout my name in frustration.

I came to a sudden stop when I got to the living room. It was filled with dangerous-looking men covered in tattoos and dressed in black clothing.

I searched for Amara, spotting her standing beside Nikolai in the kitchen.

He kept his body in front of hers as he spoke on the phone, his words low but his expression fierce. When Amara saw me, she covered her mouth with a hand and held her other hand out to me.

She was going to come to me when Nikolai threw an arm out, barring her and then looking over at her and shaking his head. Apparently even with a roomful of *his men*, he was still an overbearing, protective ass.

But I was already moving forward and pushing Nikolai's arm out of the way with a force that surprised even myself. I threw my arms around Amara and hugged her tightly.

I had no idea what was going on aside from what Amadeo had told me, but just the energy in the room felt volatile.

Everyone was talking roughly. And Russian was the only damn thing I could hear. I felt someone behind me and didn't have to look to know it was Amadeo.

"What's going on?" I pulled back to see Amara eyeing Nikolai before pulling me toward the pantry.

She opened the door, and we stepped inside, a little of the noise muting. She didn't bother turning on the light, just kept the door partially open so light spilled in from the kitchen.

"One of the Bratva underground fight rings got raided. Normally that wouldn't be a big deal. Shit like that happens all the time. We know that."

I felt my brows lower before I nodded.

"But they made several arrests, and one of those was Dmitry."

My heart started beating overtime, and I don't know why, but I felt this tightness in my body starting at the pit of my stomach and rising to my throat. It squeezed like frigid hands.

"But…" I looked down at my bare feet, curling my toes against the cold marble floor. "Men like Dmitry, men in power… ones that we've known our whole lives. They don't just get arrested."

Obviously they did, but with the mafia having the cops in their back pocket, often things were brushed under the rug or people looked the other way.

I looked up at her. “Surely getting arrested isn’t anything out of the norm, especially for a Pakhan? I mean, Gio’s been arrested a couple times. He was younger, sure, and Father pulled strings to get him out, but…”

Amara ran her fingers through her hair and pulled the elastic off her wrist, tying up the strands into a messy bun at the crown of her head.

“Yeah, typically. I don’t think they have anything that will stick, but Nikolai said they have a shitload of stuff they’ve been holding on Dmitry. They’ve just been biding their time until they could make it substantial.” She exhaled. “It's evidence that will keep him in prison for years.”

My eyes felt too wide, my heart beating too fast. I should have zero kind of reaction toward what was happening to Dmitry. But I felt this connection to him. It wasn’t anything sexual, wasn’t anything familiar, either.

It was just this *knowing*, this feeling inside of me, that he was meant to be in my life.

So hearing he could go to prison, that he would—could—be locked away for years, had a sour feeling turning in my belly.

Amadeo was standing in the pantry doorway a moment later and pulling me out of my thoughts. The voices in the room were so loud now my ears rang.

He inclined his head for me to follow. We walked out of the pantry, through the kitchen, and back to my room. Nikolai followed, wrapping his hand around Amara’s waist and keeping her close.

There was a wild energy surrounding Nikolai as he barked orders. Amara looked at him nervously, biting on her nail. His gaze softened when he glanced at her and noticed how distressed she was.

After he shoved his cell into his back pocket, Nikolai pulled her in, cupping the back of my sister’s head and whispering something in her ear. She nodded and fisted her hands in his shirt, resting her forehead on his chest.

I felt like this went far beyond Dmitry getting arrested. Maybe this was more than just a couple years of prison time? Maybe this was causing massive waves within the Bratva?

“Gio wants you back home.”

I felt my eyes bug out and was already shaking my head.

“This is not negotiable, Claudia. Your brother wants you back on the West Coast. Things are too volatile right now, with Dmitry being taken into custody. It’s only going to get worse.” Amadeo’s voice was hard and sharp.

I opened my mouth and snapped it closed, not sure what I could say. Arguing wasn’t going to help my case. I looked at Amara, hoping she’d be on my side, but the look she gave me told me she agreed with our brother.

“I just got here.” I knew I sounded like a whiny brat.

But the very thought of having to be plucked away from Amara so soon after just getting here left this hollow ache in the pit of my stomach.

I turned and looked out the bedroom window, hearing Nikolai speaking to Amadeo in deep, rough murmurs.

I exhaled, knowing it was my duty to obey, not because I was weak and submissive but because I wasn’t stupid. I wanted to be safe. I especially wanted Gio and my sister to be, as well.

But even through all of that, my disappointment was monumental. I didn’t want to leave. I knew Gio would be extra protective given the circumstances of Dmitry being arrested and how that would cause ripples within the organizations.

And God… I couldn’t help but worry about the big Russian.

Would he be okay? Would he be locked up for the rest of his life?

I felt that sour feeling in my stomach intensify. I placed a hand on my belly and had to bite my lip to distract myself from my thoughts.

“Okay,” I whispered, turning back to Amara. “I’ll gather my stuff.”

And just like that, things sucked all over again.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 13

CLAUDIA

ONE MONTH LATER

Dmitry,

I don't know if this is appropriate, sending you letters.

Amara doesn't want me getting involved. She told me I shouldn't be worried about you, that I should focus on school.

Please don't tell your brother I'm writing you. He'll tell Amara, and they'll think I have a crush on you.

I talk to Amara daily. Her and Nikolai are watching Sasha while you're away. Amara says Nikolai complains that he should give Sasha kibble instead of the steaks you demand. She said she knows he's kidding, that him bitching is his way of dealing with you in prison.

Do you get good coffee there? Probably not. I remember when Nikolai gave you a hard time about it.

I overheard Nikolai and Amara talking about where they'd sent you.

That's a lie.

I was totally eavesdropping. That's how I knew where they'd taken you, and where to send the letters. I figured

it couldn't hurt to let you know someone is thinking about you.

I know we don't really know each other aside from the few times we actually met. But if I'm lonely, I can't imagine how much worse it is for you being in prison.

Or maybe it isn't for men like you. Maybe you have a lot of people to talk to. I know I don't. But even the strongest person needs a friend, right? I could be that person for you, Dmitry. I know I'm a lot younger than you, and you probably think of me as some stupid little girl, but I feel like I've experienced a lot.

Maybe I can tell you what's going on out here? Or maybe you'll already know all of that. I'm sure your brother will keep you updated. I know when Gio got locked up, he always knew everything.

The night of the raid, they made me leave Desolation. Gio ordered it. A part of me is afraid that he'll turn out like our father. Overbearing and controlling. He'd never be cruel, never hurt me with violence, but I know being in certain positions of power means things change for you. You start thinking differently.

I really hope he doesn't change, but I can already see it in his eyes. He's hardly home, and when he is, I notice how it looks like he got into a fight. Father never did things like that. But Gio is cut from a different cloth.

I hope he learned that it's better to have a kind heart and rule than to have people afraid of you.

Anyway, I just wanted to let you know some things going on. I hope you're doing okay, and I hope you know I'm thinking about you and I'll keep writing until you tell me to stop.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 14

CLAUDIA

ONE YEAR LATER

Dmitry,

I should probably take the hint that you don't want to talk since you haven't written me back. But you haven't specifically told me to stop sending letters, so here I am.

I hope you're doing well. I ask more about you every time I talk to Amara, but she's always evasive. I know she still thinks of me as a little kid.

She doesn't want to scare me or have me get hurt. She'd probably love to take me to a deserted island and leave me there, so I was far away from all of... this.

School is okay. I'm trying to focus on getting straight A's this year. My teachers are idiots though.

I've actually had to correct them on some of their lesson plans. Let me tell you... they don't particularly like someone they are supposed to be teaching telling them they're wrong.

Amara had her baby. I'm sure you know, obviously. Luca is so gorgeous. He's got a head of thick black hair and the bluest eyes I've ever seen.

He won't be able to keep the girls away when he's older. He looks just like Nikolai.

I visited Amara over the summer and stayed at their penthouse. It's the first time I saw Sasha since everything happened. I was afraid she wouldn't remember me, but she came right up to me and nudged my hand to pet her.

She didn't leave my side the entire time I was there.

I talked to her about you, letting her know you'll be back as soon as you can. I know some people think animals can't miss or feel sad, but I can see there's a big difference with her because you're not around.

Ever since the raid, Gio has been obnoxiously overbearing. He worries so much. I mean, he always has, but ever since... well, my father's death, I can see the stress piling on him.

Writing you has become therapeutic for me. Maybe it's selfish or maybe I'm being a bitch, but truthfully, even if you told me to stop, even if I knew you were throwing my letters away—you may be now—I'd probably still write.

But I hope you don't throw my letters away. I hope you read them and they make you feel something other than loneliness. I mean, I don't know if you're kinky, but I assume you are.

And I hope you write back. I check the mail daily, hoping I'll see a letter from you.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 15

CLAUDIA

ONE YEAR LATER

Dmitry,

My mother finally moved out of the house. I'm honestly surprised she waited this long after Father's death. But I'm glad. I've never told anyone that, not even Gio or Amara. I feel bad, like I'm a sinner wishing that my mother would just go.

But she was like this zombie shuffling around, her black dress and veil she refused to remove making her seem like a ghost haunting the house. I want to scream at her to take that stupid thing off.

I want to yell and cry and ask why she's mourning a man who abused not only her but her children as well.

Gio bought her a house outside of the city. It's only twenty minutes away, but compact and in the middle of nowhere. At her request. I keep waiting for someone to tell us she died.

A part of me feels bad for her. She was abused for so long by Marco that by the time he died, she was a shell of the person she once was.

She hadn't been a mother for a long time, but she was still my mother. I still love her, even if she doesn't love me.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 16

DMITRY

CLAUDIA,

Quit this shit. I'm too old for you, and you're too smart for this. I know you asked me not to tell Nikolai, but you need to get your head out of the clouds.

What do you think is gonna happen here? We're gonna be pen pals? I'm gonna open up and you can make me the good guy?

I'll always be the bad guy. I'll always be the villain. The sooner you realize that, the better off you'll be.

I'm not trying to be a prick here, but you're too good to be sending letters to a fucking criminal.

Don't send any more, okay? I'm not going to read them.

Dmitry

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 17

CLAUDIA

ONE YEAR LATER

Dmitry,

I was just thinking how I've been writing you for the past three years. Seems surreal.

I know, in that one and only letter you sent me, you said to stop writing, that you wouldn't read my letters. Does it make me a bad person to ignore your wishes?

I'm sorry if it does, but there is something in me that says I should keep writing to you... that maybe you don't actually want me to stop.

But that might just be wishful thinking, because I'd like us to be friends, Dmitry.

I just turned eighteen and finally graduated high school.

I wrote that like it's the most exciting thing in the world, but the truth is it feels like any other experience.

Gio threw an enormous party for me. I didn't know ninety percent of the people who showed up. They all acted like they knew me. Their fake smiles couldn't hide their distaste at being there.

At least Amara came. And because of that, it made the entire thing worthwhile.

I haven't sent you anything, didn't know if you would want it or they would allow you to have personal possessions. I knew they didn't when Gio got locked up years ago.

But here are a couple of pictures of me from the party and my graduation.

Gio had a professional photographer at both. He went so overboard I was kind of embarrassed.

You probably still remember me as the awkward fifteen-year-old.

Amara keeps asking me what I want to do after college, if I want to go to college. I do. I think. Eventually. Maybe I'll take a gap year? I don't really know, to be honest.

I've always had something to do, something to work toward. And that was graduating high school. Now that I'm done with that and out of the way, I kind of feel like I'm in this limbo.

Do you ever feel that way?

Amara said you have a couple of years left on your sentence. I can't even imagine being forced to be somewhere that long, bars over the windows, strangers all around you.

But I feel like I have lived like that to some extent. I was in a prison. It might've been a beautiful one, with lavish things and staff all around waiting on me hand and foot.

But they were strangers. Often I felt like my family were people I didn't actually know. That probably sounds so stupid. It probably sounds so ridiculous comparing our two situations when they're not remotely the same.

I hope you're doing well. I'm still thinking about you, still hoping you read these letters and aren't throwing them away.

Until next time, Dmitry.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 18

DMITRY

Claudia,

I said I wasn't going to write again, that the one letter I sent was it.

But then you send me things you shouldn't, pictures of how pretty you are, how grown you've gotten. Fucking hell. You turned into a beautiful woman.

Sweetheart. Malehnkaya ptichka. Little bird.

What the fuck?

You have to stop sending me pictures of you...

Wearing that modest shit that makes me harder than I've ever been in my life.

Skirts that cover your legs, socks with little bows at the top that go to your knees. Fuck, the sliver of tanned flesh I can see peeking out from the pleated material can bring me to my knees, sweetheart.

Even now I'm thinking about the one where you're in a cardigan set with your hair in thick black waves falling over your shoulders. So innocent. All I can think about is doing the most obscene shit to you, sweet girl, things that would scare you. You'd run from me because they are so wrong.

But God, they'd be so good.

It doesn't matter that you cover up completely. It should be fucking illegal how gorgeous you are. Just thinking about you wearing that stuff around assholes makes me want to deliver some serious bodily hard on them.

I'm going to hell for saying all of that, but I already have a first-class ticket there. Besides, I'd welcome burning for eternity to get a glimpse of you once more.

Telling you to fucking stop sending me these things is what I should keep saying. It's the right thing to do.

But it would be a lie to write those words. I like getting your letters. I fucking love seeing pictures of you smiling with the sun a halo around you.

I can't tell you the number of times I've counted the freckles across the bridge of your nose.

Seventeen.

I love it all, in fact.

Hearing from you is the only bright thing in my otherwise miserable fucking existence.

I should tell you to leave me alone.

But I won't.

So go on, sweetheart, be my good girl, and keep them coming.

Dmitry

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 19

CLAUDIA

ONE YEAR LATER

Dmitry,

Can you believe it's been a year to the day since I graduated high school?

And you know what I've done since then? Not much of anything, if I'm being honest.

I've looked at online classes, even though I've been accepted to several universities, but nothing really feels right.

It doesn't feel like it's what I'm supposed to do. That probably makes zero sense.

When I think about it, it seems all muddled and confusing in my mind.

Can I be honest? All I can think about, even after all this time, is the last letter you sent me. It was so long ago, yet the words were ingrained in my brain.

Have you been getting the letters... the pictures? I'm blushing right now, remembering how you told me to be a good girl and keep sending them.

I have.

I'm so embarrassed and... excited with the pictures I tucked in the envelope with this letter, because they are more risqué.

Every week I'm hoping I'll get a letter from you, one that will give me all those hated words that made me feel things I've never felt before. I'm so embarrassed admitting this, but I figured what harm can you do? You're there and I am here. So I keep writing, keep hoping. Do you know what I hope for, Dimitri?

That you'll tell me I'm your good girl again.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

NOW

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 20

CLAUDIA

I stared at my brother with my mouth hanging open. I'm sure my expression was one of pure shock and hot, unadulterated anger.

I curled my hands tightly into fists, pinched my lips tightly together until they hurt, but said nothing. I just glared at him.

And he glared right back.

But underneath that facade of indifference and capo attitude, I could see regret. He hid everything but apathy well, but I'd known him my entire life and could see that emotion reflected in the bright blue depths of his eyes.

"I won't do it."

I saw a muscle in his cheek work as he ground his molars.

He leaned back, the leather of the chair making a soft sound from the shift of weight and position. With his hands on the arms of the chair, his fingers drumming on the leather, he said nothing.

Gio just stared.

I shook my head and said again, "I won't do it, Gio. You can't make me. I'm twenty years old. An adult. You aren't my parent or legal guardian. You are not Father." The last part was whispered on a plea.

I wanted him to remember what it was like. Surely he hadn't forgotten all the horrible things we'd gone through in the past five years?

He promised he'd never be like Father. Or maybe he never said that. Maybe I was the one who just wished he wouldn't turn out that way, an unyielding man who let the *Cosa Nostra* shape who he was.

After all… he was born to be this way, to rule with an iron fist.

You couldn't be weak and be capo. When he exhaled roughly, I saw his expression falter. I let my sigh escape and sat down in the chair across from

him.

“Please, *fratellone*. You cannot force me to marry somebody I don’t love, somebody I don’t want to.”

And still he said nothing. It infuriated me. I felt like crying, but I refused to let the tears fall and would let no one see that weakness in me.

So I tipped my chin and pulled my shoulders back, glaring at him with so much animosity I hope he felt it.

“So stubborn and strong,” he murmured and rubbed his eyes. “Just like Amara.”

He exhaled, and for a split second I felt guilt for making this harder for him. I loved my brother and knew he didn’t want to make me unhappy, that there were rules he had to follow even if he didn’t want to.

“I don’t want to, *sorellina*, but I’m getting pressure from the higher-ups. They want another alliance. They want security.” He rested his head on the back of the chair and stared at the ceiling. The sound of the fire crackling to the left would have been relaxing in any other circumstance.

I shook my head and squeezed my eyes. “Let them pawn off one of their daughters.”

“Claudia,” he said in a softer tone, “look at me.”

It was a second before the murder I felt in my veins dissipated slightly enough to where I could stand to look at Gio. But I made sure he saw my full wrath when I opened my eyes.

He exhaled again and ran a hand over his face. “I’m not Father. And I never fucking will be.” He let those words hang in the air between us for a suspended moment. “I would never arrange for you to marry a bastard, someone who laid hands on you, treated you like shit. I’d put a bullet in his head before I allowed that to happen.”

I didn’t know how to respond. I swallowed, my throat so tight, the lump lodged in the center making it hard to breathe.

“You’ll get a final say on who it is. If I don’t like him, he’s fucking out. But you know this has to be done. It’s the world we live in, Claudia.” His gaze softened as he gazed at me. “It’ll offer you protection, too. Things are becoming increasingly more volatile between the Irish and the Triad. If something were to happen to me…” He cut off those words as he clenched his teeth again and glanced away. “We know the men in our world have short life spans.” Gio stared at me again.

I wanted to tell him repeatedly that I wouldn't marry anyone I didn't love, but I bit my tongue. As I stared at my brother—*really* stared at him—I could see the wall he erected around himself when he was in anyone else's presence slowly lower.

I noticed the slight darkening under his eyes from lack of sleep and the way his hair wasn't as polished as it normally was. His white button-down shirt wasn't as crisp and pristine but showed wrinkles, as if maybe he'd slept in it. Well, the couple of hours he probably got.

I looked at his hands as he kept drumming his fingers. His knuckles were scabbed over and red and swollen. But that was something I was used to seeing on him.

He'd always been brutal for Father, and instead of delegating it to others now that he was in charge, I had a sick feeling that he kept doing the dirty work.

The weight of the world rested on Gio's shoulders, and I could see it reflecting physically.

So I let him think I would listen, that I would be amicable. But I knew there wasn't a rush. Arranged marriages took time and planning.

As if he read my mind, he ran his hand over his jaw again. "I have some men that I've handpicked. Although I don't know them personally, they are the best choices of available bachelors."

I grimaced. If Gio didn't know them personally, then I certainly didn't.

I could envision that they were old, crusty men, and once again, as if Gio read my mind or maybe I just wasn't hiding my distaste over all of this clearly enough, he chuckled softly.

"And no, they're not decrepit. Older than you, yes, but reasonably aged."

"I already told you I don't want to do this." Although I told myself I wouldn't say anything, the words slipped out. All I heard for long seconds was the thrumming of his fingers as he stared at me. "I could just leave, Gio. I could take my inheritance and go."

"You know you don't have access to that until you're twenty-one."

It was my turn to clench my teeth together, grind my molars.

"Father set it up. He's been dead for five years. You're in charge now. You can release those funds for me. Let me leave. I can change my name, move to a city."

He was shaking his head.

“Claudia, even if I had the power to release your funds, which I don’t because they’re locked in legally, where would you go? You would have to change every aspect of the life you once knew. You would have to pretend to be someone else for the rest of your life.”

I really thought about that.

“You’d never be able to see us again, never be able to talk to me or Amara. You could never come home.” He leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk, his expression fierce. “Let that sink in. Picture it. You would be utterly alone, with no protection.” For a split second I saw the flash of fear on his face before he masked it.

The tears I tried so hard to keep from falling finally threatened to spill over. I sniffed and wiped them away quickly, glancing out the window of his office, taking in the bare trees, as fall had eaten away most of the leaves.

I knew without having to ask that Gio would let me leave if I wanted. He’d give me what money he could, help me become somebody new. Escape.

He would take the repercussions of that act because he loved me. So, could I actually do it? Could I leave behind the only family I had? I’d be out there alone, terrified that I wasn’t fully equipped to handle it.

And at that moment I hated my mother and father all over again for sheltering me so much.

“When is the first meeting?” It was hard pushing those words past my lips, but until I could figure out how to stop this, I had to be amicable.

He was silent for so long I felt this twisting, sour feeling in my stomach.

“Tomorrow night.”

My jaw unhinged, my eyes widened, and I covered my mouth with a hand, feeling like I was about to throw up.

He held his hands up in surrender. “It wasn’t my call. Carmine told me personally.”

I’d heard that name once before, when I’d overheard my father speaking on the phone. Father had used a tone I’d never heard when he’d been speaking to the mystery man.

He’d sounded… afraid.

“I don’t…” My throat tightened all over again. “Who is Carmine?”

“Carmine Lucchesi. Head of Italy,” Gio said without hesitation but with clear tightness in his voice.

So… the man who called all the shots for every branch of the *Cosa Nostra* on the East Coast, if not all over the world.

I said nothing. I didn't know what I could utter that would change the course of this.

But what I knew was this one thing.

I was not going down without a fight.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 21

CLAUDIA

I heard the doorbell ring and looked at myself in the bedroom mirror, smiling, although it didn't reach my eyes.

The first arranged marriage "interview" was with a man named Riccardo Esposito. I had no idea who he was, but Gio told me he was the son of an underboss. At forty-two years old, he'd never been married and had no children.

Or so they said. Because truth be told, men in the *Cosa Nostra* weren't exactly known for their faithfulness with anyone they were romantically involved with.

They had a lot of side pieces, which meant they probably had plenty of children they didn't bother taking care of. Hell, Father probably had a few "illegitimate" children in the world. He'd, after all, gotten Francesca pregnant, lied about it, and wanted nothing to do with her.

Gio had told me to put on a nice dress and leave my hair down. What had I done instead? I twisted my hair up in a messy bun, then changed into a pair of ripped jeans, a slouchy sweater, and some ballet flats.

For all intents and purposes, I thought I looked good. Comfortable. But certainly not dressed up like I was about to meet a prospective husband.

I'd piss off Gio, but aside from him scowling and bitching, what exactly could he do? He knew how vehemently I disagreed with this whole charade.

And besides, if a man couldn't appreciate me when I was dressed down, then he didn't deserve me when I was dressed up.

There was a knock on the door and the muffled voice of a servant. "Your guest is here, Ms. Bianchi."

I stood there another few moments, staring at myself, wondering if I could crawl out the second-story window of my bedroom without seriously hurting myself.

I exhaled, more irritated than anything else. I turned and opened my door and headed down the hall. Might as well get this done and over with.

As soon as I reached the landing, I heard two deep male voices coming from the study. There was a laugh, one that sounded so fake I all but rolled my eyes. Whoever this Riccardo was, it was clear he was kissing Gio's ass.

The soles of my ballet flats were silent as I made my way across the marble floor and into the study. Gio and Riccardo stood in front of the fireplace, a square cut glass in each of their hands.

Riccardo was showboating as he told Gio all the shit he'd accomplished in his forty-two years. He'd learn quick enough it wasn't Gio he had to impress but me.

"Impressive," Gio murmured, but his voice said otherwise. I could tell he was not at all impressed with anything, and when he glanced at Riccardo, who kept talking and talking… and talking, I noticed the curl of disgust forming on Gio's mouth.

I took a step forward, just the slightest movement, but it was enough sound to alert Gio of my presence.

He glanced at me, looked me up and down as he took in what I wore, and I didn't miss how that curl of annoyance on his mouth changed to one of amusement.

Riccardo was slower to realize someone was else in the room, not a trait Gio approved of as he made a deep, irritated sound in the back of his throat. I knew without having to ask that, although the dinner would still begin, Riccardo was already out.

If you didn't realize you weren't alone, how in the hell could you protect anyone?

When Riccardo noticed me, he turned and grinned. His black hair was slicked back, almost like a shiny onyx helmet on his head. He had the thickest eyebrows I'd ever seen, ones that were reminiscent of caterpillars.

And there was a sweaty sheen to his face, one I knew had nothing to do with him standing before the fire and everything to do with the fact that he was nervous and scared shitless of Gio.

As he should be.

“I didn’t even hear you there.” Riccardo eyed me salaciously, and I narrowed my eyes. “Little things like you don't make any sound, do they?”

I cocked an eyebrow and looked at Gio. He shrugged a shoulder but shook his head right before he tossed back his drink and walked to the bar to grab another one.

Riccardo ran a finger over his bottom lip and grinned wider. “Not sure I’m all about your choice of attire for dinner, but we’ll work on that.”

I clenched my jaw and curled my hands into tight fists at the implication that I’d, what, obey this asshole if we were married?

Gio must have seen my thoughts clearly written on my face because he coughed loudly. I glanced at him to see him wipe a droplet of scotch from his mouth as he choked on the liquid.

“Let’s eat,” Gio said and drank down a second glass before setting it on the bar top and gesturing for us to follow.

Riccardo tracked me with his eyes the entire time. I sat across from him as we took our places at the dining room table. My skin felt like a hundred ants crawled over me when I watched him look at my mouth and lick his lips.

And for the rest of the evening, I had to listen to this greasy motherfucker tell me all about how he’d make an incredible husband and how powerful he’d be once he took over his father’s position.

Oh, and let’s not forget the fact that he let me know all the women he’d fucked had never been displeased with his performance in bed.

That last bit had made me actually gag on my food, had Gio slamming his hand down on the table so hard the glasses shook, and cursing something vile at Riccardo. Then, thankfully, kicked his ass out the front door.

I stood there staring at Gio after he shut the front door with an echoing, heavy thud. He faced me and crossed his arms, glaring down at me before exhaling.

“He was an ass.”

I snorted, said nothing, and went back upstairs. I knew tomorrow it would be a different day but the same shit.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 22

CLAUDIA

The next two dinners went about the same as the one with Riccardo.

I felt like this was a joke with a revolving door of prospective suitors that got nastier with each one that came to the house.

After Riccardo, I knew it wouldn't matter how dressed up or down I was. They'd take me if I was in a burlap sack because marrying me made ties with Gio. A capo with immense power and a short fuse. Hell, his reputation before becoming capo struck fear in every single person.

He was brutal, known as a savage. He thrived off bloodshed. And that's what made him such an important person to have on your side as your family. Even if it was by marriage.

So I went with modest dresses that gave the impression that maybe I was thinking about joining a convent.

Collar up to my neck, sleeves down to my wrists, and hem falling to my ankle.

What Gio didn't know, what I never told him—or anyone—was this wasn't just about me wanting to keep my independence and marry someone of my choosing.

This wasn't about being stubborn or reckless and not falling in line.

This was also about one man—the only man—I wanted.

Have ever wanted.

Dmitry.

All I could think about was the few letters he'd sent me. All I fantasized about was the one where he'd asked me to keep sending him pictures of myself.

I'd felt the desire woven in those words.

I should tell you to leave me alone.

But I won't.

My body was instantly lit up remembering those words, re-reading them before I went to bed, before I obscenely touched myself and came with the image of big, tattooed Dmitry looking over me.

I closed my eyes and breathed out, tingles of arousal filling me, claiming me.

So go on, sweetheart, be a good girl and keep them coming.

When I opened my eyes, I stared at suitor number two.

Rocco.

He was hairy, which wouldn't have been an issue. But watching him pet the patches of thick dark hair that covered his arms as he licked his lips and winked at me when Gio wasn't watching was a new level of being turned off I'd never experienced before.

The next night there was Bosco.

He was reminiscent of Riccardo in the fact that he talked way too much and liked to stroke his own ego with all his accomplishments.

Stefano was two nights later, covered in so much cologne my eyes watered, and Gio told him to leave before we even sat down to dinner.

By Sunday I was exhausted, both mentally and physically, and I could see Gio was as well. But we had one more dinner before calling it a week, and I'd never been more ready for something to be done and over with than I was tonight.

I was expecting another suitor to follow the same lines as all the rest, but Fredo was different. He didn't brag, didn't check me out, and was actually respectful.

Although I'd never accept a hand in marriage with him regardless, it was refreshing not to feel uncomfortable because someone was clearly only thinking about fucking you.

We stepped out onto the patio, the chill in the air causing me to wrap my arms around my middle to ward off the coldness. I tuned out Fredo and my brother as I stared at the grounds.

The gardener had come by earlier in the week to winterize the landscape. They'd cleared off all the fallen leaves, pruned the trees and shrubs, fertilized and mulched where needed, wrapped the shrubs, and closed off the fountains at the front and rear of the property.

Everything seemed so cold and dead now.

But it was beautiful. And I'd always felt so empty being here.

I heard Gio's phone go off and glanced over my shoulder to see him pull his cell out of the inner pocket of his suit jacket. When he saw who it was, he instantly scowled.

"What?" He barked out that lone word, and as the seconds passed, I felt the aggression in my brother rise. "Are you fucking kidding me?" His voice was low but seething.

He had a tightening around his eyes. His shoulders were pulled back as he straightened his spine, and he was clenching and releasing his free hand.

Gio cast a glance in my direction and tipped his chin inside. "Give me a second." He looked at Fredo, a furrow forming between his brows.

And then he was striding toward the patio doors and stepping inside. He kept one of the French doors open but had his back to us.

I faced forward again, and a moment later Fredo came to stand beside me. We were silent as we both stared out at the property, and it was the awkward kind that filled the space and made you squirm.

It was when I felt Fredo looking at me for long moments that I finally glanced over. I didn't know what it was, but he had this hard expression on his face, one that he hadn't presented all night.

One that I recognized because I'd seen it on my father countless times.

Instantly my instincts rose, red flags going off inside of me almost violently.

"You know," he said in a slimy voice and raked his gaze up and down my body. "Out of all the men who saw you this week…" He glanced over at the doorway where Gio still had his back to us as he muttered.

Fredo looked back at me and leaned forward, the stench of his misogyny hitting me so damn hard. His grin widened, and the patio lighting caught his gold tooth, which made him look even more sinister.

"Out of all of them, I know you will accept my proposal for marriage. I'm the highest ranking out of all prospective suitors, the one with the most power and wealth." He ran a hand over his mouth before licking his lips. "Your brother would be a fool not to give you to me."

My stomach twisted painfully and nausea rose. Adrenaline rushed through my body. At least with the other men, they'd shown who they were right from the beginning, never hiding the type of asshole they were.

But Fredo? It was very clear he wore a mask when he needed to pretend. It was obvious he was the worst out of them all. *Just like Father.*

“It’s time for you to leave.”

He sucked on his teeth in the most obnoxious way. It was clear he wasn’t used to a woman speaking to him in such a manner or dismissing him.

“And you better hope I don’t tell Gio the shit you said to me. He’ll rip out your heart and feed it to the dogs.”

He grinned the most nasty smile I’d ever seen, and I took a step back, everything in me saying to get far away.

“You’re pretty to look at. Would be good enough to fuck and pop out a few of my kids, but that’s it. You’re mouthy as fuck, aren’t you?” He curled his lip in a sneer. “When you’re mine, I’ll break you in until you won’t even think about blinking without my permission, you little bitch.”

He was in my face a second later, so close I could smell the whiskey on his breath that he’d had with dinner.

“Just wait,” he seethed. “I’ll break that disobedience out of you real fast.” He reached out and touched my hair, rubbing the strands between his fingers before lifting it to his nose and inhaling deeply.

I stared at the gold ring on his pinky. His gaze was locked on me the entire time. He pulled on the locks. A sting raced along my scalp.

I slapped his hand away hard enough I knew it had to have stung. The anger on his face instantly flared.

A shadow passed over us, and I turned to see Gio standing a few feet away, a dark expression on his face. “The fuck you just say, Fredo?”

Fredo straightened and faced my brother as he lifted a hand and smoothed it over his tie. “Nothing. Nothing. Just talking with Claudia.” The mask was slammed right back in place over Fredo’s face.

But Gio could read people as if he were looking in the mirror at himself. “Is that right?” He took a step forward, getting all up in Fredo’s personal space. Gio glanced at me. “You were just talking, Claudia?”

I slowly shook my head. Fredo dug his own grave with this.

Gio faced Fredo again. “I didn’t think so.”

For as tough as Fredo acted, I could see the unease on his face as he swallowed and took a step back.

“Say good night to my sister. Tell Claudia it was a pleasure meeting her.” Gio stepped even closer to Fredo until the other man was wedged between my hulking, pissed-off brother and the railing. “Apologize for

wasting her time and insulting her because you're a piece of fucking shit." Gio clenched his jaw, waiting for Fredo to obey.

Fredo swallowed again before glancing over at me. I could see on his face he knew he'd fucked up. Good. Let him piss his pants because he didn't know what Gio was going to do to him.

The amount of disrespect he'd shown in our own house, and the things he'd said… he deserved a swift kick in the ass.

"It was a lovely evening. Thank you for having me, and I apologize if I offended you."

The words were forced through his clenched teeth. It was clear his pride had been cut in half having to apologize to a lowly female.

I said nothing, just crossed my arms over my chest and glared at him.

"Let me walk you to your car," Gio said in his signature deep, menacing voice. Before Fredo could even move, Gio grabbed his upper arm hard enough I saw Fredo wince before he was being dragged away.

I stared at the landscaping, knowing I couldn't do this. I'd have to tell Gio I *wouldn't* do this. Even if that meant disappearing… so be it.

I didn't know how long I stood on the patio, but the chill had seeped into my bones before I finally went back inside. Once the French doors were shut, I listened to the sound of the grandfather clock in the foyer ticking away the seconds.

"Gio?" I called out, and when I didn't hear a reply, I headed toward his office.

Might as well get this conversation done and over with.

Gio was standing by the bar when I entered the room, his back to me, his head down as he wiped something off his hands.

"We need to talk."

He didn't answer as he turned around facing me. I looked at his hands as he slowly dragged a rag over his knuckles. Wiping off the blood. When I glanced into his eyes, I could see he was completely emotionless, a mask in its place.

"Is he still alive?" I didn't have to specify I was talking about Fredo. I didn't care what repercussions Fredo got because of being an asshole, but I also wasn't surprised that Gio had beaten his ass.

I just hope he didn't kill him. I wasn't sure the disrespect Fredo had shown warranted death.

But then again, my brother thought about that stuff on a totally different level.

Shoot first. Ask questions later. That was his motto.

“For now. But with a mouth like his, Fredo’s life span is going to be short.” He tossed the rag onto the bar and turned to grab a bottle of whiskey. He didn’t bother pouring it into a glass, just tipped it into his mouth, taking several swallows before facing me again and crossing his arms over his chest. “I already know what you’re going to say.”

I opened my mouth, and he lifted a hand, stopping me. I watched him silently as he made his way over to the desk and sat behind it. The exhale he let out was one of clear exhaustion.

“I don’t want to put you in an arranged marriage. All these guys are assholes. I’d rather scoop out my own eyeballs with spoons than give you to one of these pricks.”

I felt this immense weight lift off me and sucked in a ragged breath, as if it was the first time I could actually breathe.

“What changed?” This was what I wanted. I would’ve fought tooth and nail not to make an arranged marriage happen.

He looked up at me and cocked an eyebrow before leaning back in his chair and clasping his hands behind his head. His biceps bulged, and his suit jacket pulled across his torso as he gave me a sardonic smirk. “I thought you didn’t want an arranged marriage? Or did I misunderstand?”

I shook my head furiously and sat in the chair across from his desk. “No. This is what I want. I’d rather die than be with any of those assholes.” His chuckle was low and deep. “But you said Carmine…”

“Don't worry about him. I’ll figure something out.” He closed his eyes for a moment, but I knew he was far from relaxed.

I knew he was mulling things over, thinking about everything.

“A convent.” When he opened his eyes and looked at me again, I felt the confusion clearly on my face

“Excuse me?”

He ran his thumb over his bottom lip, lost in thought. “Yeah. A convent. That’s how we’re going to pull this off. It’s how I’ll keep you safe and stop these motherfuckers from sniffing around you.”

I shook my head because I had no idea what he was talking about. “What *exactly* do you mean by a convent? I’m not following.”

“I’m sending you to one, Claudia.”

If my eyes could have popped out, I was pretty sure they'd be on the floor right now. Right along with my jaw. "Um… come again?"

"We're benefactors of several religious affiliations in the States. I'll pull some strings to get you to one." He kept running his finger over his bottom lip.

"Gio." His name was a rush of air out of me. "A convent? Like… an actual convent?"

"I think there's one in Vermont. I'll have to double-check. But it's perfect." He grinned as if he'd just come up with the perfect solution.

He completely steamrolled my question, clearly in his own world as he thought this through.

"Nuns, Gio? You want me to be a *nun*?"

He snorted and shook his head, finally looking at me again. "Of course not. Well, not really. You'll have to abide by the convent rules. But you'll be protected there. Carmine isn't gonna give me shit for not marrying you off if he thinks you've taken a vow with the church."

I groaned and rested my head back on the chair, staring at the ceiling.

"For as bloodthirsty as Carmine is, he's from the Old Country, and we both know how fucking serious they take that religious shit."

I closed my eyes and rubbed them. This situation went from bad to worse. "You're insane," I murmured.

He grinned, but it wasn't one that could be construed as being happy. No, it was the one that told me Gio knew he was batshit crazy, and he embraced the hell out of it.

"The sooner we get you placed over there, the sooner I can stop worrying about this shit." He scrubbed his hand over his face. "No fucking way I am handing you off to one of those douchebags. Every single one of them got worse as the week progressed."

A part of me wanted to tell him I wasn't going to a convent, but wasn't this what I wanted? Wouldn't this solve the issue?

I wanted an out, and my brother had just figured one out for me. I wanted to make my own choices. I wanted to be free. And I'd been willing to disappear to make that happen.

At least this way I wouldn't have to completely wipe my identity. I could still be me and have my family in my life. I could still find love on my own terms. Couldn't I?

“But for how long?” Gio was silent for so long I was about to ask him again.

“My hope is once you’re out of the picture and untouchable, Carmine will move on to someone else. We’ve already given away one sister to form an alliance and a pretty fucking big one at that. If he thinks you’ve taken a vow to be a bride of Christ, he’s not gonna push it.”

Gio said that, but in his voice there was a slight undertone that told me maybe he didn’t know for sure.

But he was confident enough that I felt a little relief. I could do the convent route. Maybe stay there a year, and after that I’d be so far in everyone’s mind that they wouldn’t care what I was up to.

I didn’t ask Gio because I honestly didn’t want to know the truth. I didn’t want him to tell me I have to be there for two, three, or hell, maybe five years.

This was a win in my corner, so I took it.

Now I just had to tell Dmitry, which might very well be my last letter to him.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 23

CLAUDIA

Dmitry,

I just realized I've been writing to you for five years. Can you believe that? Seems so... surreal.

So... what's new with me? Oh God. Brace yourself.

Gio told me last week I have to get married. He picked out a few men, and back-to-back, they've come over for dinner and to do some kind of pissing contest. They were all assholes that lined up to be "interviewed" for my hand in marriage. It made me feel like a damn business transaction.

But I guess that's what women in our world are.

It's like some kind of barbaric ritual with these people.

They were all predictably disgusting. But it was the last one that had Gio realizing this wasn't going to happen.

I feared he didn't give a shit about how I felt, that I refused to marry some douchebag simply because he'd gotten orders from the higher-ups. Like I'm supposed to care about that?

I didn't choose this life and won't be used. I won't be Amara, even if she's happy and would do it all over again.

So, when the last one, an asshole named Fredo, took that mask of civility off when Gio wasn't looking, the things he said to me... how he rubbed my hair between his fingers and smelled it... that was it for him.

I was ready to disappear and see no one I love again. That would have broken my heart, torn me in two, but being in an abusive, loveless marriage where I'm only seen as important because of my reproductive organs isn't something I can allow.

We finally agreed I wasn't being thrust into a forced marriage.

But his solution wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

A convent, Dmitry. He's sending me to a convent in Vermont. Me taking a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience will put me in a religious protection where Carmine and anyone else are concerned.

I don't even know if I'll be able to contact you. So, this may be the last letter. Please know it wasn't by choice if they stopped, but this has to be done. I have to leave, have to create this whole new life for me, because the alternative isn't something I'll ever allow myself to be put into.

Claudia

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 24

DMITRY

She’d been writing to me for five years while I'd been stuck behind metal and wired glass as a prisoner in the Desolation Correctional Facility.

I’d been writing to her for the same time, yet I had only sent two letters out.

I told myself I was too old for Claudia, the younger sister of my brother’s wife. I tried convincing myself I could be a good man because I knew she was too innocent and vulnerable for the likes of me.

I was a toxic motherfucker for her.

I stared at the roll of loose-leaf papers held together with a rubber band, a cheap plastic pen shoved between them. I tightened my fingers around them until I heard them crinkle.

Malehnkaya ptichka.

That was what I’d called her in the letters, a fragile thing that was far too breakable, but I wanted to hold it even though I knew I’d crush it, regardless.

The letters had started five years prior.

I’d ignored them at first because what the fuck was I supposed to talk about with a then-fifteen year old?

I didn’t even know why she’d taken an interest in me, and the times I’d talked to my brother, Nikolai, since he was married to Claudia’s sister, he had known nothing about it.

I’d told him to shut that shit down and make his sister-in-law see that she was being stupid for talking and trying to connect with a damn convict.

But clearly Claudia didn’t care because the letters kept coming.

Finally I'd gotten so pissed that I'd written her back. Once. I'd told her to get a life, that her writing me was fucking dumb, and I wanted nothing to do with her.

Tough love was the only kind I knew, so I gave it to her tenfold, hoping she was smart enough to learn her lesson and leave me be.

She hadn't. She kept writing, which pissed me off all over again.

I wasn't a good person, and I never claimed to be. Hell, I didn't want to be.

I got to where she'd worn me down, though, to where I couldn't think of anything but her.

And so I'd sent her two letters, and I knew even that had been two too many.

But the truth was, I looked forward to her letters because it made this hole in hell I was currently in more bearable.

It wasn't until she started sending me pictures after her eighteenth birthday that I felt something changing inside of me. She'd turned into the hottest fucking piece of ass I'd ever see.

And seeing her covered from neck to knee, wearing prim and proper tops with a Peter Pan collar, pleated schoolgirl skirts, and her white knee-high socks with a pair of black Mary Jane shoes had me harder than I'd ever fucking been in my goddamn life.

Her cardigan sets couldn't hide her big tits. Her shy expressions didn't mask her angel-like face with those full, red lips and big blue eyes. And her long, silky black hair had me picturing my hand wrapped around the strands as I guided her head back and forth, stuffing her mouth full of my cock.

I realized I fucking wanted her like a fiend. I'd never desired anything as much in my miserable fucking life.

And that desire for her only grew the more letters and pictures she sent, ones I shamelessly jerked off to every single night and twice on Sundays.

Fuck, I masturbated to the thought of Claudia so damn much.

I pictured pushing her skirts up, pulling down what was no doubt white lace panties, and burying my face between her thighs as I ate her pussy out. Fuck, I envisioned coming all over her cunt and stomach and then rubbing it all over her before pushing it inside her tight pussy, marking her. I was such a sick motherfucker, but I had no desire to change.

Wanting her was a mistake. But one I would make, regardless.

I heard the buzzer go off and stopped at the steel, glass, and wire that stood between me and freedom.

Five long fucking years I'd been behind bars. The raid itself wasn't what kept me locked up. No, the bastards had been working a case against me and had so much shit stacked up that there would have been no way I could have gotten myself clear of it all.

And during that time, my lawyer had been working on getting my sentence reduced and getting me the hell out.

And for the last two years, I'd had a hard-on for a woman I had no business talking to, let alone wanting to get inside of in the most obscene of ways.

I was eager for my freedom not only because I wanted it, but because I wanted to find her and make her mine. I wanted to fuck her until she was filled and covered in my cum and would forever smell like me.

When her letters had stopped six months ago, I'd had no outlet to extinguish my frustration aside from beating the shit out of any poor bastard who crossed me.

And even that was risky, seeing as I had to stay on my best behavior if I had any hope of being paroled.

That certainly hadn't been when my possessiveness for Claudia had started, but her freezing me out had been the accelerant to it.

Now it was this fucking animal inside of me that demanded a hell of a lot more than she could ever handle.

The heavy metal door opened, and I walked through, the fresh air assaulting me. I inhaled deeply, taking it into my lungs and feeling a dark tendril move through me. I knew what this was, and I embraced it.

I didn't know when my obsession had started, but fuck me, it was a living, breathing demon taking residence in my flesh and bones that I couldn't shake.

I was a hunter. She was my prey.

Fuck, this was gonna be good, especially when I made her realize she was mine.

I hadn't been able to stop thinking about what Claudia had said in her last letter. God, it was so fucking long ago that she'd written me. I felt like a piece of me was missing, like the air in my lungs was artificial and stagnant. And I knew why they'd stopped.

Her fucking brother had sent her away.

Not only had Gio set up dinner date after dinner date with prospective arranged marriage suitors, but he was also shipping her off to a damn convent.

I understood his reasoning, knew he thought that was the only way to save her from a lifelong, forced marriage with a piece of shit and ease the pressure off from the higher-ups that wanted an alliance.

But that didn't mean it didn't still piss me off and cause the very possessive, territorial side of me where Claudia was concerned from rising and demanding blood.

And then there was the prick who'd touched her, had insulted my girl. He'd degraded her for the fact that she was nothing more than a female, as if she were just a novelty to him. I'd been chewing that over, feeling my rage grow because of it.

And she was my fucking girl in every sense of the word. Every single part of her was *mine*.

Claudia had solidified that when she refused to listen to me being a hard-ass and telling her not to write to me.

She'd made herself mine when she sent me those pictures of her tight little body with those perfect breasts, that tucked-in waist, and that lush, juicy ass. And fuck… her long, toned legs that had me picturing what she'd look like totally naked, those perfect limbs spread wide so I could get a look at her. Every. Single. Part. Of. Her.

Claudia had tied herself to me when she kept writing after I told her to be my good girl.

Fuck. I was getting hard.

I'd reached out to my connections, found out what I needed to, where to find him, and was hungry to pay that fucker a visit.

I hadn't been in a good street fight in a hell of a long time, but that shit was going to change.

I stepped out into the sun, a breeze blowing by and giving me one last scent of the stench that seemed to cling to the prison. I eyed the guards, who watched me warily, and gave them a grin and two middle fingers.

When I was finally let out and passed through the gate, free for the first time in five years, it was my brother leaning against his dark SUV that greeted me.

He had a pair of dark sunglasses on, and his black leather jacket stretched over his broad chest as he crossed his arms.

For a second he just stared at me with the most apathetic expression he could muster, and then he smirked. It wasn't a sardonic one, but a genuine tilt of his lips that told me he was happy I stood in front of him. I chuckled deeply as we embraced, slapping each other on the back.

"Look at you," he said gruffly and took a step back. Nikolai pulled his sunglasses off and eyed me up and down. "You really beefed the fuck up, didn't you, man? Looking like a damn beast, Dmitry."

There wasn't much to do in prison aside from working out, jacking off, reading, and trying not to kill an asshole who looked at me the wrong way.

Besides, the inmates knew who I was, who I controlled. They kept a wide berth or their life span would've been cut drastically short.

"Finally fucking free, brother." Nikolai slapped me on the back again. "I have a little get-together planned. The boys insisted on throwing their Pakhan a welcome home party. They wanted it at the strip club, but I said fuck that. I knew you wouldn't have wanted that, not with the way you've been acting over a certain Italian princess." He grinned wider. "And I wasn't about to hang around a bunch of nasty tits and asses when I have my Amara at home. So we settled for *Sdat'sya*. Plenty of booze so, by the end of the night, you won't even remember your damn name."

At the look on my face, he exhaled and scrubbed a hand over the back of his head. "Or I guess just skip the fucking party and jump right into bloodshed?"

"You guess right." I'd already talked to Nikolai about all of this. Hell, he was my lifeline outside of prison for the last five years, the only person I trusted completely.

He knew what I wanted… what I wanted to do. It was the only thing I'd been able to think about, obsess over, since I got her last letter**.**

He grinned and tipped his chin toward the SUV. "Well, get in, you surly bastard. We'll head to the airstrip now so I can be back to Amara before dinner."

I grunted in affirmation, got into the passenger seat, and took the sunglasses Nikolai handed over.

"Let's go kill a motherfucker."

Nikolai chuckled. "Music to my fucking ears."

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 25

DMITRY

"He's there—"

"I know exactly where he fucking is." My voice was a hiss of words and sounds, barely restrained rage as I rested my forearms on the bar countertop and stared at the piece-of-shit bastard I planned on killing slowly.

When Nikolai didn't react, I looked at him.

My brother lifted an eyebrow at my tone and shook his head, chuckling. "Fuck. Look at you. Ready to kill the bastard with a shitload of witnesses. Aren't you on parole?" He smirked.

It was my turn to raise an eyebrow. "Yeah, I am. And what about it?"

He shrugged and faced forward again, staring at where Fredo was seated. Nikolai brought his beer bottle to his mouth and took a long drink, tightness forming around his eyes the longer he watched the other man.

When he set it back down on the scarred, dirty countertop, he said, "Pretty sure you're not even supposed to leave the state."

I made a low growl. "You know parole and rules don't fucking matter to me. We make sure of that by lining the pockets of those who matter."

Nikolai chuckled softly. He sobered as he continued to watch Fredo. "If he did to my Amara what he did to your Claudia"—his voice was so low I felt the blast of ice come from him—"I'd slowly peel the skin from his body in strips, hang them up in a nice line right in front of him, let him see everything I'm doing." Nikolai grinned, a glint of sadistic need in his eyes. He glanced at me. "Please tell me we are going full savage on his ass."

I stared at Fredo and ran my thumb along my bottom lip. “Full-on barbaric, brother.”

“That’s what I’m fucking talking about,” Nikolai said with a grin. “I don’t mean to rush you, but can we get this moving along? This place is a fucking wasteland, and I want to get back to Amara.” Nikolai pushed his beer bottle away with a scowl on his face and straightened his shoulders.

I glanced around the hole-in-the-wall place that stunk of body odor and spilled booze.

It had been easy enough to find Fredo. The fucker didn’t hide his tracks. He either was too dumb or he thought he was untouchable.

I was about to change his way of thinking tonight.

I looked at Nikolai. “Do you have the place set up?”

He grunted his affirmation and glanced at me. I gave him a chin lift that it was time to do this. My brother stood and walked out of the bar, and I faced forward again, running the cheap napkin under my beer between my fingers until the fibers of it tore.

Fredo Columbo, forty-one years old, son of Domenico, an underboss in Gio’s territory. The bastard was high enough to marry a capo’s sister but too low on the totem pole to be much of a threat.

But it didn’t matter if he was the head of the fucking *Cosa Nostra*. I would’ve slit his throat and ripped out his tongue, regardless.

He forfeited his life when he fucked with what was mine. And that’s what Claudia was.

Mine.

He sat at a round table with three other men. He had a scantily clad woman on his lap, one who was wasted as fuck, given the fact she couldn’t even keep her eyes open and her head kept tipping forward as if she were falling asleep.

Her mascara was smeared under her eyes, and the track marks on her inner arms told me she was probably higher than a fucking kite.

I had a vivid image of the night in question, the small snippet of information Claudia had given me in her letter. I didn’t know if half the stuff I was envisioning actually happened to her, but it didn’t matter.

The fucker had touched her. Insulted her. I was going to cut pieces off him and send it to her as a gift, evidence of how I could take care of Claudia, how I would destroy anyone who thought to get in my way of keeping her as mine.

The bartender, an older man with a scraggly beard, slid my shot to me. He was gone before I even picked up the glass.

I tossed the shot back and set it on the counter, my focus still on Fredo.

A moment later Fredo stumbled up, the woman on his lap almost falling to her ass from the sudden motion. He gripped her around the waist, keeping her tight against his side as he stumbled right past me and out the front door.

I watched him in the cracked and dirty mirror, grinding my molars as my anger grew to encompass me completely.

I stood and followed him out. No one paid me any attention. They were too fucking drunk or high or smart enough to not make eye contact with me because they feared the monster I was.

Once outside, I could hear Fredo just a few feet to my right, leading the woman to an alleyway. Predictable.

The fucker was no doubt about to take advantage of her.

I spotted him as he turned the corner, all but dragging the stumbling woman behind him. She giggled and hung on, mumbling incoherently.

I pulled out a cigarette, lighting the end and putting it between my lips. Such a fucking nasty habit. I stepped into the alley, the single streetlamp barely piercing the darkness. But I could see Fredo just twenty feet ahead.

He pushed the woman against the brick wall, his hand sneaking up her skirt as he latched his mouth to her neck.

I inhaled deeply, a single flare from the end of my cigarette lighting up momentarily before I pulled it away and exhaled.

Fredo was so lost in his work with the woman he didn’t even notice he was blocked in. Me at the entrance. Nikolai at the other end.

There was the *swish* of a lighter opening and closing.

Open and close. Open and close.

It echoed enough that Fredo finally lifted his head from being buried in the woman’s tits to look in Nikolai’s direction. But my brother was shrouded in the shadows. The only distinguishable feature was his massive body in a relaxed stance as he braced a shoulder against the side of the building.

“What the fuck?” I heard Fredo mutter as he glanced at Nikolai and then at me.

He stumbled back, and I grinned.

I brought my cigarette to my mouth again and took a long hit. We said nothing. Just watched him.

After a long minute I finally moved a step forward, and Nikolai mirrored the act.

“Get the fuck out of here,” my brother harshly said to the woman. She giggled and stumbled away, moved past me, and headed down the street.

Now it was just the three of us.

Before Fredo knew what was happening, we had him cornered, his back to the bricks, his beady black eyes bouncing from me to Nikolai.

“What the fuck’s going on?” Fredo tipped his chin up and pulled his shoulders back, trying to seem bigger than he actually was.

I would’ve laughed if I found any of this funny, if I didn’t have murder on the brain.

As it was, just looking at him and being this close to the prick reminded me of what he did to Claudia.

All I could imagine was what he would do to her if he had her as his.

I didn’t realize I was growling like some kind of fucking primitive beast until Fredo took that minuscule step back that had him pressed even harder against the brick wall.

“You really did a number on my brother,” Nikolai said, still clicking the lighter open and closed, the metal catching before he flipped it back open. “I’ve seen my brother pretty upset many times, but nothing like this.”

And then Nikolai grinned so sadistically I couldn’t help letting one form on my mouth, too.

“That tells me he’s gonna go savage on your ass.”

“Do you know who the fuck I am?” Fredo’s voice wavered.

He could act like he was brave, but I could smell the stench of fear pouring off him. It was clear he’d never gone up against genuine threats.

He probably controlled a bunch of pissants who jumped when he told them to because they knew who his father was.

“How are we going to do this?” Nikolai asked me as he stared at Fredo. “Fist or needle?”

Fredo’s brows pulled down low, and he looked between Nikolai and me.

“A needle would be easier,” I said, low and deep. “Less painful for you initially.”

But no. That’s not how we are going to do this.

I curled my hands tightly into my palms, my blunt nails digging into my flesh.

Fredo’s beady eyes bounced back and forth, and I watched his hand go for his pocket. No doubt he was packing a gun in there.

The second that Fredo looked at Nikolai, I reared back and slammed my knuckles into the center of his head, causing his skull to crack back on the brick so loudly I was pretty sure bone broke.

He gave a deep grunt before falling to a heap on the ground.

I took a step back and spit on his unconscious form.

“Fist it is,” Nikolai said and closed his lighter before slipping it into his pocket. “Let’s get this party started.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 26

DMITRY

An hour and a half later, we were in an abandoned storage container by the harbor.

I didn't ask Nikolai how he'd found something so quick. My brother and I had connections that ran deep and long, and Nikolai had a way of getting whatever he wanted.

Being known as a raving fucking lunatic had people getting shit done for you.

I stared at Fredo as he was strung up. Although he was limp and barely breathing, I kept the bastard conscious enough so he knew what was happening to him.

I looked over at Nikolai, who grinned. Blood was splattered across his face and chest.

The fucker was just as psychotic as I was, especially when it concerned protecting what was ours.

Hell, he might've gone even more brutal if some fucker had laid his hands on Amara. I knew he'd killed one of her guards simply because he hadn't watched her thoroughly enough. Beat the poor bastard to death with his bare hands.

I smacked Fredo's cheek. The man groaned before he tried to open his swollen eyes and lift his battered head. I knew he could see me; the little slits of his eyes were open enough.

"I wish we had more time," I said conversationally and walked around his body, appreciating the view of him clinging to the last bits of his life.

I ran my fingers over the knot Nikolai had tied around Fredo's wrists.

"*Zdorovo, tvoya rabota bezuprechna, brat*." *Nice. Your work is impeccable, brother.* I glanced over at Nikolai, and he smirked, tossing a blade up in the air and catching it by the handle.

Up and down. Up and down.

"*Ya podgotovil na amare*." *I've been practicing on Amara.*

His grin turned from sadistic to something else before he winked.

I curled my lip in disgust and held my hand up. "I know you won't go further talking about that shit with Amara—what with being a territorial fucker—but I'm still gonna tell you to shut the fuck up. Last thing I want to know is what you do with your wife."

Nikolai said nothing in response, just kept tossing the knife up and catching it as he stared at me.

I focused on Fredo again. "My imagination is vivid on what I plan on doing to you, cocksucker." I pressed my finger into a nasty knife wound in his shoulder, and he whimpered.

I had to give the piece of shit credit. For all the begging and pleading he'd done, he kept his mouth shut where Claudia was concerned. There were many times when I was working a guy over that he ran his mouth with insults. And I never fucking cared. I didn't give one fuck what they said about me before I killed them.

They could spout off whatever they wanted to. But if Fredo would've said one nasty thing about Claudia? I wouldn't have been able to make this last long.

I would've killed him right on sight in the most barbaric way. Maybe beating him to death with my bare hands and crushing his chest before ripping it open and tearing out his heart.

"And as much as I want to spend all fucking night here taking my time with you, cutting out piece after piece of your worthless hide, I have more important things to do. I have somebody important to see."

Fredo struggled minimally. One of his shoulders was dislocated, and his body was too weak from blood loss and having the shit beaten out of him to do much of anything else.

I chuckled low and pulled out my knife. The blade was so sharp that when I pressed it gently to the pad of my thumb, it instantly broke the skin.

A bead of blood welled up, and I dragged my tongue across it before taking the knife and placing it underneath his chin.

“You know who I’m going to go see as soon as I’m done mutilating you?” I didn’t wait for him to answer. “Claudia. Did you know she’s mine? She’s been mine for the past two years.” I dragged the knife over his neck, down the center of his torso, and stopped right at his navel. “Of course, she doesn’t know she’s mine, but I’ll change that soon enough.”

His head hung forward, so he wasn’t looking at me, and I gripped his chin and jerked him up, forcing Fredo to look me in the eye as I plunged the knife right through his belly button.

He let out a gargled sound, blood spraying out of his mouth and covering my neck and shirt. Nikolai snickered somewhere behind me.

“I’m going to bring her a little present. Pieces of you,” I said in a deadly voice as I twisted the blade and dragged it up, opening him from belly to throat.

The sounds he made were of a dying animal. His body jerked as if he were having a seizure, his muscle control nonexistent.

“I’m going to rip out that gold tooth in your mouth and take off that ring on your pinky finger and give them to Claudia. Little trophies, so she knows what I’m capable of… the lengths I’ll go to, to make sure she’s safe and protected.”

“Goddamn,” Nikolai said as I stepped back. “And they say I’m the fucking crazy one.”

Fredo’s insides spilled out of him and landed on the cement floor with a wet squelching sound.

I took out a cigarette from the inside of my jacket, my fingers bloody as I placed it between my lips, and then grabbed my lighter.

Once the end flared brightly, I inhaled and watched Fredo struggling to hold on to that last bit of life.

“Look at you fucking smoking as you watch the bastard die.”

I shrugged and exhaled. “It’s a nasty fucking habit, but it relaxes me.”

“That shit will kill you.”

I cut a narrow-eyed glance at Nikolai. “I think smoking a cigarette here and there is the last thing I need to worry about concerning my life span.”

Nikolai snorted and stared at Fredo, watching as he sputtered, the wet sound coming from the blood filling his lungs.

I kept the cigarette in my mouth as I snagged the pliers and pried his mouth open. I wanted him still alive as I did this.

I reached in with the tool, gripped his gold tooth, and pulled that fucker right out. I set it on the table beside me and took the gardening shears.

Fredo was barely breathing, but I knew the prick could feel every second of this.

I rested his pinky between the blades of the shears, and I stared into his face as I cut the finger off.

Snip-snip, motherfucker.

The digit fell to the ground and rolled over to Nikolai. He curled his lip and kicked it away.

“The fuck, man.”

I pulled the cigarette out of my mouth, blowing out a cloud of smoke at Fredo’s face.

He gave one last death rattle, and then his body went limp.

“What the fuck is up with trophies, man?”

I shrugged.

“Giving your girl fucking body parts after you kill him?” He was silent for a moment before muttering, “Why didn’t I ever think of that?”

I looked over at my brother and could see he was seriously thinking about it. He’d probably stew over the fact that he hadn’t ever given Amara any little pieces of the men he killed for her.

We were so fucked up. Then again, we wouldn’t want it any other way.

“You got someone ready to clean up?” I snatched a rag off the tray where all the tools were and started wiping the blood from my hands.

Nikolai grunted and walked over to stand in front of Fredo. He reached up, used his knife to slice the rope that held him suspended, and then chuckled softly as Fredo’s body crumbled to the ground.

“Course I fucking do. I’m not a damn amateur.” Nikolai pulled his cell out and, after a second of it pressed to his ear, said, “Got a sale on some used lawn mower parts. Model 5024 Hudson. Gonna need about”—Nikolai took a step back and eyed Fredo—“three men to help you carry them all out.” A second later he was off the cell and facing me.

We didn’t speak as we headed outside. I glanced at my brother once we sat in the SUV, the vehicle started and idling.

“Did you get the information I needed?”

Nikolai looked at me as he sat in the driver’s seat. If he was the type of person to roll his eyes, I was sure he’d be doing it right now. He pulled out

his phone, tapped on the screen a few times, and a second later my cell chimed with a message.

I opened up the attachment, scanned it briefly, and gave a grunt of acknowledgment. When I felt Nikolai watching me, I asked, “What?”

He was silent for a second, and I looked over at him as I tucked the phone into my pocket, waiting for him to say whatever the fuck he was about to spit out.

“You’re going full-on psycho stalker mode, brother. I just feel like I should point that out.”

I gave a humorous laugh, and when he looked at me, scowling like a grouchy bear, I flipped him off.

“You’re one to talk. Weren’t you staking out Amara‘s house before you even got married? Stalking your wife-to-be like a fucking creep?”

“That was different.” Nikolai shrugged, but I could see him smirking. “We were arranged to be married. Totally normal for me to check out my future bride.”

I snorted in humor. *Sure. Totally fucking normal, man.*

I knew he wasn’t offended that I’d called him out. In fact, I knew he was fucking proud of that predatory shit he did with Amara. What he felt for his wife went well above being obsessed or in love. I didn’t even know if there was a word for what he felt for her.

“Seems like perfect law-abiding-citizen behavior to me.”

Nikolai absolutely had a screw loose, but then again, didn’t we all?

“Gonna have issues with her brother.”

“Fuck her brother.” It was Nikolai’s turn to laugh. “Bastard won’t do shit. He’s got to much on his plate to worry about what the fuck I do.”

“Nah, Dmitry. He’s protective of his family, as he should be. You really want her, you need to make that known to him. Last thing we need is some asshole going rogue because you fucked his little sister and offended his sensibilities.”

He was right, but we also both knew Gio wouldn’t start any shit with us, not even if I offended his family name. He’d never put the alliance we had between the Bratva and *Cosa Nostra* at risk.

“This isn’t just about fucking Claudia.” I stared out the window, the image of doing just that to her instantly in my head and causing my cock to stiffen. “I want everything. I want it all with her.”

“Yeah, kind of got that vibe when I watched you torture and kill a man for insulting her.”

I glared at him. It was on my tongue to point out he’d done damn near the same thing when Amara’s bodyguard insulted and threatened her. Hell, Nikolai shot the guy point-blank between the eyes on their wedding day after finding that out.

“Just be careful. I got your back no matter what. But I also don’t want shit blowing back. Tied to the Bianchi family now. Get my drift?”

Nodding, I scrubbed a hand over my face.

But no matter what, I’d make Claudia mine. I was going to go see her with blood staining my shirt and another murder marked on my soul.

She didn’t even know I was on my way. Probably didn’t even know I’d been released.

She sure as fuck didn’t know I was obsessed with her and had every intention of claiming her as mine.

Daddy Dmitry is gonna show his good girl all the filthy things.

What I wanted to do when I finally claimed her was so fucking unhinged it should’ve had me questioning myself and my morals.

But that little voice in the back of my head whispered, *What morals*?

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 27

DMITRY

Twenty-four hours later and I was no better than Nikolai where stalking our women was concerned.

Because of the flight from the East Coast, the shit with Fredo flying back to the West, and the grueling jet lag and time change, by the time I got into Vermont almost forty-eight hours had gone by.

It had been the middle of the night when I arrived, and although I knew Claudia would've been asleep, I still went to the convent. I crept around the fucking gated property like some kind of predator.

But that's what I was. And she was my prey.

I'd gotten the layout of the building from Nikolai and memorized the hell out of it on the flight over. I knew where her room was located. I knew what her schedule was.

I knew what every single fucking aspect of her life here was for the past six months, better than she probably knew it herself.

I rented a room at the local motel. Could only get a couple hours of sleep, shovel some food in my mouth, and then, as soon as the sun rose, I made my way back over to the convent.

There was a park right across from it, a playground to my left, picnic tables to my right. A few wooden benches were scattered around. The thick wall of beech, birch, and maple trees created a shady canopy over the otherwise gloomy area.

I sat on one of those benches. The lapels of my coat were flipped up to block some of the chilly morning air. I stared straight ahead as I drummed my fingers on my knee. I was antsy as fuck, just wanting one glimpse of Claudia.

It was like I was a damn addict needing an extra hit, having gone without it for so long that I was jonesing for it hard-core.

I'd never wanted anything more in my miserable fucking life than I wanted Claudia.

Not money, power, or respect.

She was this virus in my veins. A terminal illness. She was the reason I woke up. Why I killed. Every fucking thing I did, I did with the thought in my head that it was for her.

All for her.

There was a group of preschoolers running around the playground, screaming and laughing. Even that did nothing to drown out the sound of my racing heart.

Fuck, I hadn't been this eager for anything in… ever.

A brisk wind picked up, and I glanced at my wristwatch.

7:58 a.m.

I'd been unable to sleep, unable to think about anything aside from coming to see her.

Fuck. I ran a hand over my face.

Pictures were good and well, but I wanted to fucking *see* her in the flesh. I wanted to watch the sun hit the raven color of her hair. I wanted to be close enough I could reach out and touch her skin and feel if it was as soft as it looked.

I wanted to lean in and bury my face at the side of her neck and inhale deeply, taking in her scent, before dragging my tongue across her skin and tasting her.

Goddamn it, I just wanted it all.

7:59 a.m.

I started bouncing my knee up and down, then leaned forward and braced my elbows on my thighs, hands clasped, cock hard because I was thinking about fucking Claudia.

My focus was pinpointed on the front doors of the convent, and I counted down the seconds.

8:00 a.m.

A moment later the door opened, and I sat straight, the blood rushing through my veins as adrenaline flooded me.

I was a far enough distance away where I couldn't see her physical features, but fuck. Just knowing she was walking toward me had my

muscles tightening involuntarily.

I knew what her schedule was today and had memorized that, as well.

She did charity work at one of the local food banks, serving breakfast to those in need for two hours.

After that, she ate lunch at a little café she liked. She always ordered the same thing.

A vanilla cappuccino and a ham and cheese croissant.

And then after that, she wandered over to the garden across the street.

Although the flowers would be good and dead this time of year, she still liked to walk the cobblestone path that weaved its way in and out of the landscaping.

And I knew all of this because I'd had Nikolai get all the information for me as soon as I realized where Gio had sent her.

We'd had someone watching her, documenting her schedule so that when I got out, I would know exactly where to find her.

And there she was, close enough I could see her face clearly. My cock gave an appreciative jerk in my pants, digging, abrading the zipper. The fucker reminded me that for the last two years I'd been needing to get inside of her in the worst kind of way.

Jesus fucking Christ.

I was rock-hard to the point my cock throbbed.

And her outfit was what my wet dreams were made of. I'd pictured her in this little religious schoolgirl outfit as I jerked off more times than I'd ever admit out loud.

Her black Mary Jane shoes. Those white knee-high socks. That pleated, plaid skirt that fell to the top of said socks and just barely showed a sliver of tanned skin.

And then there was the fucking top. Her blazer had the emblem of the convent. And the white, button-down shirt was stretched tight across her tits. I knew it wasn't supposed to be as arousing as it was, and to anyone not obsessed, to anyone fucking normal, it probably would have been a mundane outfit.

But when it was on her—for me—that modest attire was the hottest fucking thing I'd ever seen anyone wear.

She hadn't noticed me as she took a right and headed down the sidewalk toward the food bank. I kept a respectful distance away, not sure why I was trying to keep myself hidden.

What I wanted to do was tangle my hand in her long locks, jerk her head back, and latch my mouth to her throat. I wanted to lick and suck at her, leaving my mark so everyone knew who she belonged to.

I wanted to press my body to hers so she felt how hard she made me.

A groan nearly ripped from me so loudly it would have given me away. It would have shown her where I was, that I was stalking her gorgeous ass.

Speaking of ass… Claudia had the perfect one. All plump and round. Built like a fucking apple. And I fucking loved apples.

When she got to the food bank, she stopped, gathered her hair into a high ponytail, and secured it with an elastic band.

My fingers twitched to gather those strands and twist them around my hand, keeping her close as I whispered all the obscene things I had planned for her.

I walked toward the alleyway between two buildings, leaned my shoulder against it, and settled in to watch her through the large window in the front until she left. And then I'd follow her again.

My only plans today were to stalk her and to come up with a way that I didn't scare the fucking hell out of her when I demanded everything from her.

But it didn't matter how much I thought about it or how I spun it. I wasn't a gentle man. Never had been. I took what I wanted, dominated the situation, and that wouldn't be any different when I made Claudia mine.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 28

CLAUDIA

Since leaving Sisters of the Immaculate Heart this morning, I'd felt… weird. There had been this tightening on the back of my neck and this tingling on my arms. It felt as if someone had been watching me all morning, and I couldn't shake the feeling.

No amount of looking around, seeing if I noticed anyone's gaze on me, had gotten rid of the sensation. And every time I checked, I always came back with nothing.

But the paranoia was real, and it was something I'd never felt before. It unnerved me.

For the last six months since being at the convent, I'd done what Gio said. I kept my head down, worked on my religious studies, and followed the rules. I acted as if I enjoyed being there when that was the furthest thing from the truth.

I was modest and polite and knew when to keep my mouth shut and listen.

Although it went against every part of me—the part that rebelled at being told what to do—I still obeyed.

I knew this stubbornness in me was a lasting effect from my traumatic experience and abuse from the shit my father had put me through.

I focused on cleaning up my station, the last of the breakfast rush ending. But still, I felt like I was being watched.

"Need help?" Jacob, one resident who helped at the food bank, came to stand next to me.

I smiled and shook my head. "Thanks, but I'm just finishing up." I set the wet pan on the counter to air-dry and grabbed a rag to wipe off my

hands.

That tingling on the back of my neck intensified, and I lifted my fingers, trying to rub the sensation away. But the thing was, it didn’t dissipate. It just kept getting more intense.

I glanced behind me and into the large room where we served everyone. Empty school-style cafeteria tables were lined up, filling the center of the room. The large window in the front let in a stream of morning light.

But there was nobody there.

“Hey,” Jacob said and touched my hand.

An uncomfortable sensation surrounded me, and as if instinct told me a dangerous animal was close by, I stepped back. Jacob’s hand slipped from me, and his brows furrowed.

“Are you okay?”

I shook my head to clear my thoughts and glanced at him again. “I’m fine. Just a lot on my mind.”

That was an understatement. Even if I didn't feel weird this morning, the last six months had been stressful. It didn’t matter if I acted like everything was okay on the outside. Inside, I was slowly dying.

For one thing, I wasn’t sure how long I had to keep up the charade that I was willingly at the convent because I wanted to be closer to religion. If it kept me from marrying a mafia asshole, so be it, but not *knowing* was a killer.

I missed Dmitry. I didn’t care if I’d only ever gotten a couple letters in return over the last five years. I’d still gotten them, cherished them, and in fact, I reread them more times than I’d ever tell anyone.

The confusion on Jacob’s face was heavy. His dirty-blond hair brushed over his forehead and was a little longer around his ears. It was a shaggy mess, and coupled with his lean, tall form, he looked like he belonged on the beaches of California surfing.

I’d known him for the past several months, ever since I started volunteering at the food bank.

His father was an attorney in town and did a lot of pro bono work for the community.

“I’ll see you on Thursday,” I said and turned, feeling unbalanced suddenly.

He gave a half-hearted wave, the confusion still covering his expression. I was probably acting like an idiot letting this anxious energy

consume me, and over what? I didn’t even know what I was so antsy about.

I slipped on my blazer, grabbed my bag, and then headed out. I stopped at the little café I always went to after volunteering.

As usual I ordered my vanilla cappuccino, ham and cheese croissant, a couple of biscotti, and thanked Trudy, the older waitress who always seemed to be there when I stopped by.

I gave her a generous tip because I knew it was a slow season and I’d witnessed some of the assholes she had to serve. A little extra would make me a little happier, so I figured it would for her, too.

I might be staying in a convent, but Gio kept my personal account padded with more money than I needed. I was pretty sure he did that because he felt a little guilty, given the situation.

I headed toward the gardens, having an hour to kill before I had to be back at the convent for my studies.

Although I wouldn’t really call where I was headed a “garden” this time of year. Everything had been pruned and landscaped. The flowers were now nothing but bulbs in the ground waiting for the spring so they could grow again.

But regardless if it was barren and dead this time of year, I enjoyed walking the paths. The thick trees gave privacy, but hardly anyone visited the garden right now. It was almost as if this area was a ghost town.

It gave me time to think, or more so, time to think about someone in particular where I didn’t feel guilty fantasizing about him within the walls of a convent.

Dimitry. The big, Russian mob boss.

The things I thought about would have the nuns calling me “impure”. They’d make me feel like I was committing some mortal sin or breaking the law.

Imagining Dmitry fucking me as I lay in my bed, surrounded by religious artifacts, made me feel dirty. *Dirty in the best way*, my mind whispered.

The thought had me flushing. Truthfully the things I’d imagined doing with the Russian—or, more aptly, having him do *to me*—should have made me feel ashamed. Or at the very least, a wanton slut who asked for more, who asked for it harder.

Spanking. Throat grabbing. Biting me until he left marks on my body.

The list went on and on. I stepped into the entrance of the garden, the wrought-iron fence pushed open. My thoughts had heat and arousal rising throughout my entire body.

I was sick. There had to be something seriously wrong with me to have this twisted desire and fear of the type of sex I craved. *But only with Dmitry*, my warped mind whispered.

I could see bags of garbage off to the side, the flower beds recently raked of dead leaves and debris. The final touches of winterizing everything were in full effect.

I walked the tiny cobblestone path, and scents of freshly tilled earth mixed in with the warm afternoon breeze filled my head.

Although it was chilly out—this time of year making a thick layer of frost form on everything early in the morning—it had been unseasonably warm the past week. Something I'd been taking advantage of as I sat outside in the convent grounds and soaked up some vitamin D.

I made a beeline toward a small path that wound its way through the thick line of trees. Although I was in the middle of town, it almost felt like I was deep in the woods when I took this route.

I circled around about half an acre and came out on the other side of the gardens. An older gentleman in a city uniform walked out, another trash bag slung over his shoulder.

He tipped his hat and gave me a polite smile as we passed. All I heard was the sound of birds chirping and leaves rustling along the ground as the wind picked up.

I felt alone, that solitude someone found when they were comfortable in their own skin.

After a couple of minutes of walking, I sat down on one bench and pulled out a biscotti. I broke off little pieces and tossed them in front of me, a few goldfinches fluttering down from the treetops to peck at the ground.

As hard as I tried to not think about Dmitry, it was no use.

A part of me didn't want to push the idea of him away. But another part said I was better off without him.

It didn't matter what he'd said in the last letter he sent me, about how he wanted to see more of my pictures, about how he wanted me to be a good girl.

I could only imagine how sexually frustrating it was for a man to be locked up for five years. I'd teased him, edged him with those pictures,

however inadvertently.

I thought having no contact with Dmitry for six months would have dimmed this infatuation I had for him. I assumed it would have had it dissipating until there was nothing there any longer.

How wrong I'd been.

It was still stronger than ever, as if I were still communicating with him, as if he'd just sent me a letter telling me he loved the pictures I sent and wanted more.

After tossing a few more crumbs of biscotti to the ground, I blew out a slow breath. But then I felt that familiar tightening along my skin, and every muscle in my body became ultrasensitive.

I glanced around and, of course, didn't see anything or anyone. I slowly stood and curled my fingers around the paper bag that held the other biscotti.

I might have seen no one, but I knew I wasn't alone.

I stilled and felt my skin tightening, the very roots of my hair on the top of my head tingling.

A bird scattered above, as if something dangerous frightened it. Although I assumed I was alone, I knew I wasn't.

I could feel someone close by. Watching me. And when I turned around, my breath caught, my heart dropped to my belly, and I felt my jaw go slack.

All because the man standing in front of me was supposed to be in prison.

Dmitry.

Yet here he was, staring at me as if he'd been starved for years to get one glimpse of me, like I was the only thing he wanted to devour.

My mouth was dry, my heart racing. I felt this weird fear, not the kind that told me I needed to get away from Dmitry. It wasn't the type of fear that was bone-deep. It was the kind that gave me an adrenaline rush.

"When did you get out?" My voice was so low I didn't even know for sure if I'd said the words out loud.

But when he made a gruff sound deep in his throat, I knew that was the only answer he'd provide.

"Does Gio know you're here?" I whispered. He shook his head and took a step forward. I took one back. "My brother will kill you if he finds out."

Dmitry smirked and kept advancing.

"I don't care who your brother is or what he's capable of."

I didn’t know what he meant by that. He was just as dangerous as Gio, but the intonation of his voice told me there was something else. Something more.

I was soon pressed up against a tree. Nowhere to escape.

This little voice in my head whispered, *But do you actually want to leave? Do you want to run?*

No, resounded in my head.

He was right in front of me, and the scent of him saturated my lungs, surrounding me.

He reached out, and I froze. He stilled for only a millisecond before he snagged a lock of my hair and twisted it around his finger. I stared up at him, feeling like my eyes were far too wide to look normal.

He was silent for so long that I didn’t know if he’d ever speak. Dmitry just kept rubbing that lock of hair between his fingers.

“You know what it felt like for me, being forced to stay away from you for the last two years? You know what it felt like being without you?”

I couldn’t breathe. God, why couldn’t I breathe? He smelled too good. He felt too good so close to me. I slowly shook my head even though I was pretty sure his question wasn’t a question at all.

Dmitry pulled back and stared into my eyes, slowly bringing that strand of hair to his face and running the end along his lips before inhaling deeply.

“*Kogda ya ne s toboy, mne kazhetsya, chto ya kopayu sebe grebanuyu mogilu*.”

When I’m not with you it feels like I’m digging my own fucking grave.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 29

DMITRY

Jesus Christ.

Claudia was finally right in front of me and looking hotter than the fucking sun.

Her big blue eyes and dilated pupils, her expression showing me she was terrified, turned me on like a goddamn fiend.

She had the most perfect, pink lips. They were slightly parted and had me envisioning how wide they could go as I stretched her mouth with my fat cock.

I couldn't stop myself as I reached out faster than she would expect and curled my fingers around her tiny wrist. I stroked her radial pulse, my focus on her eyes as I watched them flutter before nearly closing.

Her pulse was racing like the wings of a little bird.

"Are you afraid of me?" I leaned in a fraction, inhaled again, my lips by her jugular watering for a taste of every part of her.

"Yes," she whispered, finally answering.

"Mmm," I hummed in pleasure. "Is it because you know I kill anyone who crosses me?" I kept stroking her wrist. "Or is it because you're afraid of how I make you feel, how your body lights up from the inside out with all the frighteningly erotic things you want me to do to you?"

I pulled back just as her eyes snapped fully open and she looked at me with a panicked expression.

Oh. My girl had thought dirty things, filthy things she wanted me to do to her. I'd just been putting feelers out for my sick, perverse need.

I leaned back in and whispered against the shell of her ear, "Tell me all the things you want me to do to you, *malehnkaya ptichka*."

“W-what?” That lone word stuttered out of her on just a breath of air.

I pressed even closer, my cock so hard the massive length now dug into her hip. I couldn’t hide it even if I wanted to. *Which I don’t.*

She tried to stifle her gasp but failed.

“Tell me. Give me what I want.” I pulled back again just as her eyes flared and her mouth parted. “*Khoroshaya devochka papy*.” At her hazy, arousal-filled confusion, I grinned. “You like being Daddy’s good girl?”

She didn’t respond right away, just slowly slid her tongue along her bottom lip. I groaned, tightened my hand around her wrist until her breathing picked up, and had my mouth hovering right above hers.

“Does calling myself Daddy—calling you my good girl—make your tight pussy wet right now?”

She moaned and closed her eyes, resting her head back on the tree trunk. “Yes,” she whispered.

“*Khoroshaya devochka*.” Fuck, Claudia was going to be the death of me. So innocent. She was fucking vulnerable and perfect.

And all mine. Only mine.

I ground myself against her, rolling my hips so she really felt my cock digging into her body.

“Jesus, Claudia. I’m so hard, sweet girl.” I pressed into her repeatedly. “You feel that?” I groaned like a dying animal.

I kept her pinned to the tree, my thumb pressed to her pulse at her wrist. It was beating so fast. I had my other hand resting on her waist.

“Tell me how wet you are right now. Whisper to me that if I slipped my hand between your legs, you’d soak my fingers.”

Her moan was the sweetest fucking thing.

“I know you’re embarrassed to say such dirty things, but it turns me on so fucking much.” Dragging my tongue over her neck, I lapped at her like a lion tasting his mate.

“This… this is so wrong. I have to go.” She placed her palms on my chest and gave a half-hearted attempt to push me away.

“I know it is, baby, but doesn’t it feel so good?”

“Yes,” she finally said, giving me what I wanted instantly.

I slid my hand down her upper thigh, teased my fingers along the hem of her little schoolgirl skirt, and slowly pushed it up. I stared at her face, gauging her reaction. Although I couldn’t have stopped even if I should have.

“Dmitry? W-what are you doing—”

Her words trailed off when I pressed myself to her. Chest to chest. And when I cupped her face and tipped her head back, she gasped.

“Such a good girl being so pliant and not fighting.”

Every part of me was so fucking tense, and the longer I pressed myself to her, the more I memorized the sight and smell of her and the feel of her lush, feminine body against mine, the more I felt my control fraying.

She still had both of her palms pressed to my chest. Did she realize she was no longer pushing me away but gripping my shirt and keeping me close?

“Look at that,” I murmured and glanced down at her fingers as she tightened her hold on my button-down. I groaned, my mouth by her ear again, my voice strained. “If you knew the things I wanted to do to you right now—”

“Like what?”

I chuckled deeply, my voice so low I was surprised she could even understand me. “My greedy girl is so eager to hear the fucking nasty things I plan to do to her.” I sucked her earlobe into my mouth, and she shivered.

My other hand was still on her upper thigh, her skin warm, silky smooth. I bet her pussy was soaked, those little panties she wore so fucking drenched…

I groaned again and didn’t stop myself from creeping my fingers up and touching them, seeing for myself if I was right.

Fuck yeah.

“Is this all for me?” I growled, rubbing my fingers back and forth, pushing the wet material against her cunt, feeling her pussy lips part slightly from the force.

Claudia started rolling her hips. Inadvertently, I was sure.

“Fuck. So hungry for my cock.” I ground myself into her hip. “You feel how big I am? Can you imagine how good it’ll feel when I finally push into you?” *Motherfucker*, but that thought could have had me coming in my slacks. “It would hurt.” I bit her throat. “I’d have to force myself inside because I know how tight you’d be.” I sucked at the spot right above her collarbone. “But you’d be so fucking wet, little bird. So wet that you’d make a mess as I fucked you.”

“Dmitry.” My name was a breathy, aroused moan from her.

“I want to spread your legs, pull your panties aside, and sink my fingers into your hot pussy.” I rubbed her clit through the cotton. “I’d have to stretch you before I fucked you properly, scissor my fingers so you could get a sample of how my thick dick would feel.” I dragged my tongue up and down her throat. I moved my mouth to her lips, just barely touching them, and said in a hushed tone, “You’d feel like I was breaking you in two, but you’d beg for more.”

I pulled back and rubbed her clit. I needed to watch her as I brought her to the edge, as I watched her crash over.

“*Ya tak silno khochu v tebya*.” *I want inside of you so bad.*

Her pupils were blown as she stared into my eyes, but when they closed, I stopped, growling. “Eyes on me. I always want them on me when I touch you.”

Slowly she opened them, being my good girl all over again.

I resumed rubbing her clit. “There will never be another man for you but me.” My voice grew deeper, and I rocked my hips harder against her. “Say it,” I snarled, now brushing my lips back and forth over hers.

She whimpered.

“You're mine, Claudia. Fucking say it.”

She moaned loudly. “I’m yours.”

“Say it again. Say it all.” I continued to rub her clit. Not so hard or fast that she’d come, but with enough pressure to keep her on the brink.

“No one will ever have me but you.” She gasped. I moved my hand to her throat, curling my tattooed fingers around the slender arch and adding the smallest amount of pressure.

I rubbed my fingers over her clit faster and felt a hard tremor move through her.

“Is your pussy clenching, sweetheart?”

She moaned and nodded.

“I bet you wish I was fucking you right now, isn’t that right?”

“Oh God.”

I dragged my tongue along the seam of her lips. “Open for me.” She opened instantly, and I didn’t hold back from plunging into her mouth.

Damn, she was sweet.

“I want to fuck you so badly. Right here. Right now.” I kissed her harder, moving my tongue in and out of her mouth like I wanted to do between her thighs. “You want me to fuck you until you’re sore?”

“Dmitry. Oh God, this is too much.”

“Never,” I growled.

I felt this surge of dominance and possessiveness run through me and slid my fingers from her throat to her hair. I tunneled my fingers into the silky strands, pulling it back so her neck was arched.

I tugged at the strands harder, my nostrils flaring, feeling my eyes growing hooded.

“A little voice in my head says to be gentle with you because we both know you’ve never been touched, isn’t that right?” She didn’t have to answer for me to know that was the truth. But she nodded regardless. “I know that because I’ve had someone watching you for the last two years. I’ve been making sure no male gets close enough to you.”

Her breath faltered. Good. I wanted her to feel unhinged by the truth.

“You’ve been having me watched for two years?”

I grinned, knowing I looked like a shark. “I never pretended to be a gentleman or a good guy.”

She shook her head and tried to slip away, but I tightened my hands on her hair again. Didn't she know trying to deny me, trying to get away, only made my cock like granite?

“*No ty ved' ne etogo khochesh', maleeshka? Ty khochesh zhestkogo, grubogo i gryaznogo. Ty khochesh etogo edinstvennym sposobom, kotoryy papa mozhet tebe dat*.” *But that's not what you want, is it, little girl? You want it hard and rough and dirty. You want it the only way Daddy can give it to you.*

A soft sound left her in response, and even though she didn’t understand what I’d said, she knew what I hinted at.

My filthy little thing liked me calling her out on the depraved shit she wanted—that *I* wanted.

“You don't have to admit it, Claudia. But we both know you like that I'm the bad guy. You love that I'm a killer and will fuck you even if I'm covered in blood.” I leaned in, dragging my nose along the side of her throat.

She shivered against me, her body so small compared to mine that she felt like this tiny doll. *My little doll.*

“For two years you’re all I’ve thought about.” I groaned. Her breath hitched, and I growled. *God, it feels so fucking good having her pressed to me.*

“Dmitry,” she breathed out my name.

“Mmm, say my name again, but say it softer, breathier.” The way she shivered, the fact that she breathed harder, faster, had my cock so hard the damn thing was liable to tear through my zipper.

She shook her head slowly, and I grinned, inhaling deeply.

“You smell so fucking good. Makes me harder than I’ve ever been.” I was a lewd fucker as I kept grinding my lower half into her, letting her feel how stiff my cock was for her.

“You want to come?” She shook her head, but I knew she wasn’t telling me no. “Will this be your first orgasm?” Claudia shook her head again, and I groaned. “Nah, you've been touching this sweet little pussy when you’re in bed? You lay in the dark and explore yourself until you bite your lip and explode?” I idly played with her clit, waiting for her answer.

“Yes.”

I could tell by that barely there whispered word that she was embarrassed admitting that.

“What do you think about?” I licked her lips and plunged my tongue inside. I pulled back, giving her a moment to suck in a shaky breath.

I knew what she thought about, but I was a glutton for her words, a selfish bastard to hear her voice as she admitted things she’d never utter to another living soul.

I increased pressure on her clit, and she rose on her toes before rolling her hips, rubbing her pussy on my hand as she sought her pleasure.

“You,” she finally said, giving me what I wanted.

My cock liked hearing that and gave an appreciative jerk against my zipper.

“What were we doing?” She shook her head before I finished, and I grinned. “*Moya milaya, malehnkaya ptichka*.” *My sweet little bird.* “Was it really dirty?” I knew she was close

“I can’t.” She licked her lips and shook her head.

I dipped my head and dragged my tongue along where her tongue had just been. I tasted a sweetness that only Claudia had, one that I was already addicted to.

“It’s just you and me, *lyubeemaya*. Tell me your dirty secrets.” Faster. Harder. Her clit was so hard now, this little bundle of nerves that would send her over the edge. I bit her lip and tugged at the flesh just as she started breathing faster.

“You hold my throat.”

I let go of her hair and gave her a nice hand necklace again. “Like this?” I whispered and tugged at her bottom lip again.

She nodded and closed her eyes. I didn’t order her to look at me. I let her have this one moment to herself.

“You bite me… leave marks on my body.”

Fuck. Yeah, that’s it.

“What else do I do to you?”

“You’re rough.”

“Mmm. Keep going.”

“You… you make it hurt, and I beg for more.”

God, pre-cum was dripping from the tip of my dick so thickly the front of my slacks were damp.

“But I like it. I want you to be brutal.”

Holy fucking shit.

I slammed my mouth on hers. She sucked on my tongue just as I knew she found her release. Her sexy little mewl nearly had me blowing my load without even touching my cock.

Her underwear was destroyed, my hand slick from her pussy juices.

“And I’ll give it to you just like that. I’ll fuck you like my little whore.” She sagged against me as her climax ended, and with my hand still on her throat, I pulled my other one up so she could see my fingers. “Look at the mess you’ve made of me.”

She slowly peeled her eyes open and took in my glossy digits. I sucked on them, licking her juices clean, then slid my fingers up to her jaw and forced her mouth open. I shoved my fingers inside, making her taste her pussy and my saliva. She lapped at them, moving her tongue around me, mewling like a hungry little kitten.

And then I stepped back. My girl sagged against the tree, staring up at me with wide eyes and parted lips.

“You should probably head back to the convent. They’ll be expecting you soon. Don’t want to piss anyone off.” I winked. “But remember what I told you.”

She steadied herself and straightened. “Remember what?”

I growled and lowered my head, still keeping my gaze focused on her. “*Ty moyah*.” *You’re mine.* “And that this is only the beginning.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 30

CLAUDIA

I honestly didn't know how I'd made it back to the convent because I didn't remember walking away from Dmitry.

I felt like he stepped away. Then I'd blinked, and he was just… gone.

And now, here I was locked away from the world with my body on fire, my panties so wet they were uncomfortable, and every cell in my body aching to throw myself back into his arms.

I closed my bedroom door and leaned against it, breathing hard. My heart was still racing as I thought about the things he'd said to me and the way he'd made me feel.

Alive. He'd made me feel like I was alive for the first time in my life.

I opened my eyes and pushed away from the door but froze when I saw a small gift box sitting on my pillow. My heart was thundering as I glanced around the small, barren room, expecting to see someone hiding in the darkened corners.

I knew the nuns wouldn't have given me anything, especially not a gift wrapped with a bright purple bow. Then who?

Possibly Gio, but he always told me when he was sending something. And he hadn't told me shit so…

I didn't know why my hands shook as I walked toward the bed or why my heart was racing as I reached down and picked it up. The box itself was small, fitting easily in the palm of my hand, and weighing almost nothing at all.

I sat down because, truthfully, I felt like I had a live wire inside me from what happened in the gardens with Dmitry.

With still-shaking fingers, I gripped one edge of the purple satin bow and pulled, unraveling the ribbon until it fluttered to my lap. Then I pulled the top off.

For a second I felt confusion, not sure what I was looking at. But then my heart started racing for another reason, and a cold sweat beaded along my forehead.

Lying atop ruffled, lavender satin were Fredo's pinky ring and his gold tooth.

I dropped the box. The gold fell out and hit the scarred wooden floor with a soft *clink-clink.*

I watched the ring roll a few feet away before coming to rest right in front of my window. The sunlight caught the metal, and it shone for a moment as if the damn thing was winking at me.

I didn't have to guess anymore who had sent these to me. I knew without a doubt. This was a *gift* from Dmitry.

Hand now covering my mouth before I even realized it, I ambled toward the window and glanced out. The convent grounds were small but beautifully landscaped.

A tiny shed was at the far end of the property. It wasn't used anymore and had been cleaned out, so it was nothing but an empty shell. But the nuns still had made sure it had a fresh coat of paint, cleaned the windows, and I knew the inside was equally clean.

Although I didn't see anyone or anything out of the norm, I knew Dmitry was out there watching. He'd been having me followed for years, he'd admitted. That should have terrified me.

That should have had a shitload of red flags flaring in me.

Instead I felt this warmth settle within me.

He was all I wanted. For years. He'd been the only man to make me feel… anything. Desire. Fear. Curiosity. All of it.

Even when I'd been too young to know what need and want for another human truly was, Dmitry had fascinated me.

And as I grew older, my feelings for him had gone deeper, like the roots of a tree burrowing into the earth.

He'd made his intentions pretty damn clear. Was I okay with that?

His intensity scared me. His possessiveness turned me on.

But if I truly didn't want this—with him—I knew I could call Gio. He'd get me out. He'd make it so Dmitry left me alone.

Would he, though? that little voice whispered.

If he was anything like Gio, nothing and no one could deter him from what he wanted.

But wasn't this what I'd been wanting for years? For Dimitri to notice me, to touch me the way he had in the garden, for him to say the things he had?

Hadn't I told myself I'd never get involved with a man who ran in the social circles that I'd always been a part of? Wicked men. Dangerous and violent ones. That's exactly who and what Dmitry Petrov was.

He was just a different branch of that savagery.

The circular cobblestone patio with two wrought-iron benches was where I normally went to work on my studies and "pray."

At least that's what the nuns wanted me to do while I was out there.

Usually I just sat there and enjoyed the peace, pretending I wasn't who I was and my family wasn't connected to what they were.

But my thoughts always strayed to Dmitry.

I glanced down at where the gold tooth and ring lay. I knew what they represented. Fredo was dead, and these trinkets were Dmitry's way of proving to me he'd taken care of the problem.

That he'd protected me.

Oh God. I was in deep.

I closed my eyes and breathed out.

I realized my mistake had been divulging too much information in the letters. I shouldn't have said anything. But I also couldn't deny that a thrill went through me at the thought of Dmitry going as far as he had because Fredo had insulted me and touched my hair.

I knew how deep symbolism was embedded in our world.

The tooth because Fredo had used his mouth to say crude things to me. His pinky ring because it had been attached to a finger that touched me.

I was at least thankful Dmitry didn't send me Fredo's hand and tongue instead.

I was confused, a little terrified, but underneath all of that, I felt this anticipation. It was like it had been simmering inside of me for years. It was now bubbling over, and I was experiencing what genuine excitement felt like.

It was all kinds of messed up. I knew that without a doubt. I shouldn't feel anything but disgust and terror when I thought about men like Dmitry,

the leader of the Bratva in Desolation who'd, without a doubt, done heinous shit.

He wouldn't have a gentle bone in his body.

But his touches had been soft and passionate, even if I felt the barely leashed, territorial possessiveness.

I needed to figure out what exactly was going on. I needed to understand what exactly he wanted from *me*. That would have to wait until tomorrow. And I knew he'd find me. No matter where I was, Dmitry would know exactly how to find me.

There wasn't a doubt in my mind he wasn't close by, watching me this very moment, even if I couldn't see him.

I walked over and picked up the ring and tooth, biting my lip as I placed them back in the box.

A shiver raced through my body at the mere thought of Dmitry, of what he'd done to Fredo, of how much he'd hurt him. And I knew he had… so much.

That shouldn't have turned me on the way it did.

I had to find out what was going on and what he wanted.

I knew what *I* wanted, and that was Dmitry. All of him.

The good. The bad. All of it.

I'd known that's what I wanted for years, even if I never voiced it. But I worried once I found out his true motives, once I heard all he wanted from me was a warm body to give him pleasure, my heart would never be the same.

So I needed to find that out, because the last thing I'd be was a man's fuck toy, even if that man was the only one I'd ever wanted.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 31

DMITRY

"Are you fucking serious?"

I could hear the shock and anger in Gio's voice as I pressed the phone harder to my ear and ground my teeth.

I didn't understand why he was so fucking surprised. Plans like this were made within our organizations all the time. Had been for centuries.

"More serious than a fucking gun pointed between your eyes," I said.

I stood across the street and kept to the shadowy part of the building I was currently leaning against. I watched as Claudia sat outside on one of the patio tables at the little café she favored.

She was nervous. I could see it in her body language. She kept bouncing her leg, biting her bottom lip, and glancing around. She was waiting for me. Looking for me.

"Is this how the fucking Russians do business? Over the phone instead of doing this shit face-to-face?"

I could practically hear Gio's teeth grinding in irritation, and it had me grinning.

"You don't even have the fucking respect to come to my house and lay this all out?"

"I have business elsewhere. Important fucking business that I can't deviate from."

But I didn't want to leave Claudia. I wouldn't. Not now that she was so close. Not now that I'd tasted her.

Flying to another state in order to deal with "business" was the last fucking thing on my mind. I should've handled this with Gio while I'd been

on the West Coast killing Fredo, but I'd been thinking with my dick, and it had pointed east, to where my girl was.

I glanced down at her feet, her toe tapping anxiously. My gaze traveled up the sweet curves of her tanned legs. She was fucking perfect, more beautiful than anything I'd ever seen.

And my cock agreed. The thick length throbbed behind my slacks. I thought I'd jerked off a hell of a lot while locked up, but after touching and tasting her yesterday?

Jesus Christ, I'd stroked my cock three times just last night thinking about fucking her.

But they felt like empty orgasms. I wanted to be buried deep in her tight pussy. I knew it would be the sweetest fucking agony. I wanted to tear through her innocence and then bury my face between her legs as I licked up that virgin blood.

Fuck, but I was a fiend for her. And I knew when I had Claudia—because there was no other option—I still wouldn't get enough.

I'd become addicted the more time I spent with her, craving her, yearning for every single part of her until we were one fucking being.

"This fucking guy," Gio said, clearly speaking to whoever was in the room with him and not to me.

I growled low, and he chuckled deeply.

"Listen, if you're serious about this, I want a face-to-face. I'm not agreeing to anything until shit's laid out on the table and all the fine print is on display. You feel me?"

I clenched my jaw, and although I was completely focused on this conversation, my gaze never left Claudia. I wondered what Gio would say if he knew I'd been stalking his baby sister. He'd cut off my fucking dick if he knew what I'd done to her yesterday.

I fucking grinned so wide my face hurt.

The malice grew in me at the thought of the challenge Gio would present.

"And before you go off spouting your mouth, Gio, you'd do well to remember who I am and who you are. Don't forget the fucking secrets I keep. You feel me?"

"This fucking, *stronzo.*" Gio gritted those three words out, then laughed.

But I knew there was no humor behind it.

I didn’t fucking care if he was pissed. He knew I was right. He’d give me what I wanted, when I wanted it. “You can throw a fit if you like, but it won’t change the outcome of this. We can meet, but I’m going to go through with it whether you agree with my offer.” If I’d been right there in front of him, I knew I would’ve felt a blast of cold air pulse out of him and surround me.

I disconnected the call, shoved the cell in my pocket, and made my way across the street to Claudia.

I stopped when I was right behind her, already rock-fucking-hard.

She was unaware that I stood so close, that I was reaching out and wrapping a long strand of dark hair around my finger.

I noticed a couple of people watching warily. I was pretty sure they wanted to say something, to warn her a dangerous man was so close to her.

But when I met their gazes, gave a wink as I leaned in and brought her hair to my nose to inhale deeply, they glanced away.

“Good morning, *malehnkaya ptichka*.”

She gasped and spun, but I was already moving around the table and taking the seat across from her. I pulled off my sunglasses, hooking them at the collar of my T-shirt and resting my elbows on the table.

The waitress came forward, but with a firm shake of my head, her eyes widened and she did a U-turn, walking away from us.

Claudia was once again wearing the standard-issue convent uniform. If the nuns knew how fucking hot Claudia looked dressed like a schoolgirl, all modest and shit, they’d probably wrap her up in a fucking burlap sack and lock her away.

Not that anyone or anything could keep me away from Claudia.

The only thing that could come close was death itself, and I was so obsessed with her that I wasn’t even convinced I wouldn’t come back from the damn grave to make her mine.

I shifted on my seat, trying to ease the heavy ache in my balls and cock. It was no use, not with Claudia sitting right across from me and looking like every guy’s fucking fantasy.

With that thought in mind, I glanced around the small patio, grinding my molars when I saw a bastard looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

I should pluck those right the fuck out of his head, just pop his eyeballs out with the butter knife beside my hand and serve it as an appetizer to the woman sitting across from him.

“*Dmitry*.” Claudia’s soft voice immediately drew my attention back to her. Strange how such a tiny little thing held so much power over me.

“Mmm, the way you say my name, all breathless like that, makes me wonder if you’d sound like that when I finally push into your little pussy.”

Her mouth dropped open before she promptly shut it and looked away, clearly embarrassed.

It was cute as fuck.

I was sexually frustrated and tired of jerking off. And the object of my obsession and fantasies was sitting right across from me.

She didn’t speak and neither did I. I could have stared at her without uttering a word and I would have died happily.

I ran a hand over my mouth and breathed out. I was fucked where this woman was concerned, but I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.

Finally she blinked a few times as if trying to clear her mind. Her cheeks were the prettiest fucking shade of pink, and I ran my tongue across my teeth, wanting to taste her again… wanting to taste *every* part of her.

I would, without a doubt. Hell, I wanted to clear this fucking bistro table, lay her out flat, and suck out her pussy like it was my last meal.

“Why are you here? How did you even find me?” Although she asked it like a question, I didn’t bother answering.

She knew I’d known exactly where she was. She’d been waiting for me.

At my silence she reached down into the bag by her feet and pulled out the box tied back up with the purple bow. Claudia slid it across the table until it sat between us.

“Why did you give me this?” Her voice was soft, timid as she glanced at the box.

“You ask questions when you already know the answers.”

She licked her lips and nodded, and I was transfixed at the sight of her plump, pink mouth.

“*Chto ty podumala, yesli uznala, chto ya porezal Fredo ot pupka do gorla za to, chto on posmel tebya oskorbit*?” *What would you think if you knew I strung up Fredo and opened him up from navel to throat for daring to insult you?*

Her eyes looked so blue, the sun catching the color and making them almost glow. God, she was fucking incredible, so gorgeous it was painful.

“*Chto by ty pochuvstvoval, yesli by ya skazal tebe, chto budu delat' eto kazhdy den do kontsa svoyey zhizni, chtoby ubedit'sya, chto ublyudok*

znayet, chto proizoydet, yesli on trakhnetsya s tem, chto prinadlezhit mne?”

“English,” she whispered.

I didn’t answer right away, just stared at her, knowing I was making her feel unsteady. It turned me on watching her squirm.

“How would you feel if I told you I’d do that every day for the rest of my life to make sure every bastard knows what would happen if they fuck with what’s mine?” I inhaled, feeling my nostrils flair and my anger rise at the very thought of another Fredo prick getting close to my girl. “Because you *are* mine, Claudia. You’ve been mine for the last two years.”

She slowly shook her head, but I knew she wasn’t denying it. She was confused. A little frightened. But she knew in her soul what I said was the truth.

“He touched you, so I killed him. And I’ll do that to anyone who fucks with you. It’s as simple as that.”

“This is all happening so fast.”

I was the one to slowly shake my head now. “It’s been twenty-four fucking months since I knew I’d never let you go, that I’d tie you to me any way I could.” I reached across the table and grabbed her hand, stroking my finger along her pulse point just like I had yesterday. Her pulse beat frantically under my touch.

When I said I’d tie her to me in any way I could, I wasn’t exaggerating. But she didn’t need to know I’d been thinking about how far I’d go. No need to scare my pretty girl so soon into our relationship.

Did she realize she leaned forward, that she was so close only a slip of paper could slip between our mouths?

“And you want to give yourself to me, don’t you?” Her eyes fluttered closed and I groaned. “Yeah, my sweet girl wants it all. But only from me, isn’t that right?”

Her breathing was rushed as she nodded, agreeing with me.

“You’re my good girl. My perfect, *malehnkaya ptichka.”*

I let go of her wrist and slid my hand along her arm, over her shoulder, and up her neck. I circled her throat lightly, wanting to add pressure but not wanting to scare her with the possessiveness I felt.

“It makes me so fucking crazy how hot you are.” My focus was on her lips, and I felt my dick twitch at the sight of her tugging at the bottom one. With a slip of my thumb, I pulled the flesh free. “If you think I won’t do inappropriate things to you with all these people around… try me, *kotenok*.”

I gave her neck a gentle squeeze, heard her sharp intake of breath, and nearly fucking groaned in pleasure at the sound. I forced myself to move back and sit like a respectable man, giving her space.

For long seconds Claudia didn't move. She still leaned across the table as if she wanted more. And my entire body tightened at that idea.

"I'm going to make this really easy, *Claudia*." I loved the way her name rolled off my tongue, like it was always supposed to be part of my vocabulary.

She blinked a few times, as if coming back into focus, and slowly leaned back in her chair. God, her modest fucking outfit made me so hard.

I reached down and shamelessly adjusted my cock. I heard someone gasp in outrage and smirked but kept my focus on my girl.

"I'm going to spell it out all nice and easy and put a little bow on it, just like I did when I gave you those presents." I pointedly looked at the box still sitting between us. "For the last two years you're all I've wanted. And as soon as I was released, I came hunting for you, sweetheart."

Her pulse was beating so hard at the base of her neck. I wanted to drag my tongue across it.

"Nothing and no one will keep you from me, not even you and your fear of the unknown for what I have planned."

"What you have planned?" she whispered.

"I'd scare the shit out of you if I told you all my secrets." I grinned but it wasn't a friendly one. It was a smile full of dark promise and unrequited sexual threats.

Her pupils were so big I could only see a thin circle of brilliant blue around the blackness. She bit at her bottom lip again, something I noticed was a nervous habit for her.

It also made her look innocent and vulnerable, and made me fucking feral.

I didn't—couldn't—stop myself from reaching out again and pulling her lip free from her teeth. "Don't tempt me, *malehnkaya ptichka*." Before I delivered on all the promises I'd told her, I stood. We had solved nothing in this brief interaction, but we didn't need to.

She was mine no matter what. I'd come here so I could stare at her, so I could hear her voice and take in her scent. I smoothed a hand over the lapels of my jacket, and her focus went to my tattooed hands.

“Oh,” I said and waited for her to lift her eyes back to me. “Don’t let that little fucker who works with you in the soup kitchen touch you again. If he does, I’ll break his wrists.” Her eyes widened and her lips parted. “I’m the only one who touches you, Claudia.”

And with those as my parting words, I turned and left, knowing I couldn’t stay away for very long.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 32

DMITRY

I’d gone back to the shitty little motel I’d been staying at while in Vermont. I’d showered, tried to sleep for a few hours, but had tossed and turned more than anything else.

I was obsessed. Good and fucked where Claudia was concerned, and I didn’t even care how crazy it all was.

She was so young, only twenty to my mid-thirties. So inexperienced. I knew I’d been her first kiss up against that tree. I knew my hard cock had been the only one she’d ever felt. I knew all of that because as I’d admitted to her, I’d had her watched.

I felt no shame in the matter either.

But even before that, being part of the *Cosa Nostra*, she’d been sheltered and protected. Her father and then Gio had made sure she was kept away from anything that could corrupt her.

Because to them, her hymen made her valuable. A fucked-up and archaic belief, but I knew parts of the Bratva held on to that same culture for their women.

Nikolai and I, though? The Desolation Bratva? We believed women were just as strong—if not far fucking stronger in certain aspects—than even the men were.

I threw away the bag of food I’d grabbed earlier, sucked down my third beer, then sat in the uncomfortable, outdated chair and stared at the TV sitting on the scarred dresser on the other side of the room. It was off, and my blurry visage was reflected.

One day. Twenty-four hours.

That’s how long I’d given her to really *think* about what I’d said. I didn't even know why I’d given her any time at all. Even if she tried to deny being with me, I was a persistent motherfucker when I wanted something, and I’d never desired anything more than Claudia.

She wasn't getting away from me.

But frightening her with the intensity of what I felt wasn’t something I wanted to do to her. At the thought, it actually had this hard and painful tugging at the center of my chest.

I cracked open my fourth beer and drank half of it as my mind wandered to thoughts of having her up against that tree again. God, I was sick of jacking off, but having that image on repeat in my head while I came in my hand hadn’t been the worst thing I’d ever done.

My cell vibrated and skittered across the bedside table, and I reached over and flipped the burner open. A text from Nikolai came through.

NIKOLAI

You bringing my sister-in-law back to Desolation soon?

I smirked and shook my head, typing out my reply.

DMITRY

Sister-in-law?

Three dots popped up right away.

NIKOLAI

Shit, did you already force the little thing to marry you?

I snorted but was grinning, because truth be told, picturing Claudia as my wife made me feel all kinds of fucking possessive.

DMITRY

I have to ease her into that shit. Didn’t get myself an easy arranged marriage like your ass did.

NIKOLAI

When have you ever eased anyone into anything?

He was right, but this was different. *She* was different. I wanted her… happy. I didn’t want her tied to me because she was afraid.

DMITRY

Spoke to Gio about the plans. He’s hesitant, but he’ll give in to it all. He’s backed into a corner and he knows it. He isn’t going to deny me shit or he’ll start a war with the Bratva. I don’t give a fuck if you’re married to his sister. I’ll break that fucking alliance if he doesn’t comply.

NIKOLAI

I sent over the documents earlier today. Didn’t hear back, but we know he’ll get in contact. Keep me updated on what the fuck is going on. Keeping this shit from Amara doesn’t sit well with me, brother.

DMITRY

If you need to tell her, by all means do it. In the end it doesn't matter because Claudia will be mine. Your wife will find that out sooner rather than later, and besides, I’m not gonna have you bust my balls over Amara being pissed because you kept shit from her.

NIKOLAI

Fuck you.

I grinned and set the phone down. I finished my beer just as my phone vibrated again. I assumed it was Nikolai giving me more shit, but when I saw a number I didn’t recognize, I knew it was Gio. He was the only one other than Nikolai who had this burner’s number.

“Yeah?” I said lazily into the phone and leaned back into the chair.

A tense second passed through the receiver. But I knew Gio was on the other line, probably hating that he’d reached out. The fucker was just as stubborn as Nikolai and me.

“I looked over the bullshit contract your brother sent over.” I held in my chuckle at the sound of his teeth scarring together. “I have a few changes, but agree with the rest.”

“That’s good.” Not that I would have let him get out of it anyway, but if he wanted to think he had control over this…

“When can you be here to get the paperwork sorted for this bullshit deal?”

I grinned. “End of the week. I have some business to handle where I’m at first.” And that business was making Claudia come a few times. Then I’d break it to her that I was taking her away from this bullshit place and she

was mine. “Have everything readied for me because I’m not waiting around.”

“Jesus Christ,” Gio cursed. “Are all Russians as fucking insane as you?”

I thought of Claudia and grinned. “I may have broken the mold with that.” I disconnected the call, stood, and got ready to do a little stalking.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 33

CLAUDIA

I’d gotten back to the convent several hours ago, did my studies and prayers, placating the Sisters with my “duties” being a good Catholic girl in the eyes of God. And now I found myself out in the gardens.

The burner phone I had was from Gio, one that the nuns kept locked up until our weekly phone call every Sunday, or if he needed to get ahold of me in between that.

At first, having no phone or Internet, no real social media access had been frustrating. I hadn't realized how dependent I’d become on it.

But the longer I went without it, the more I enjoyed not having to be a slave to all that toxicity that came with having your face glued to a screen.

“I’m going to have a plane pick you up at the end of the week.”

My brother's voice was hard, harder than I’d actually heard it in quite some time. Something was wrong, but I wasn’t about to ask him. If he wanted me to know, Gio would have already spit it out.

Mentally and emotionally I really couldn’t deal with whatever shit Gio and the *Cosa Nostra* was going through. For all I knew, he just had a lot on his plate, which was probably the truth of the matter. And therefore he was taking it out on anybody close to him.

“Pick me up as in you want me to come home? For how long?” The holidays weren’t for a little while yet, and that was really the only time I went back to the East Coast.

Gio had said it would look too suspicious if I came home any more than that. I just followed his lead because the last thing I wanted to do was marry some *stronzo*.

There was a long pause of silence, and I pulled the cell phone away, glancing down at the screen to make sure I was still connected. “Hello?” Gio said something else in Italian to whomever was in the room with him, and then said to me, “A car will pick you up Sunday afternoon and take you to the airstrip. Be ready, Claudia.”

“Okay,” I said hesitantly. “But how long am I going to be there?” Not that I was complaining about being home. In fact, I was happy to be surrounded by all the things I was familiar with.

But on that thought, I also felt a strange tightness in the pit of my stomach. Leaving meant I’d be farther away from Dmitry.

“We’ll talk when you get back home. But I have to go. Just be ready for the car Sunday. I’ll let the Sisters know about the change of plans.” His voice was strained at the end, but I still heard the strange pitch in it, one he was trying to mask.

After the call was disconnected, I stared down at the cell, wondering what exactly was going on. A noise at the garden shed caught my attention, and I glanced up, noticing that one of the wooden doors was partially open.

I knew the nuns didn’t go in there except every so often to clean it. I tucked the cell into the pocket of my blazer and stood, walking toward the outbuilding. I could hear something rustling around. Stepping to the side, I gripped the handle and pulled it open wider, peeking around the side.

At first I saw nothing in the shadowy interior, the light muted from the two smaller windows on either side of the shed.

And then something darted toward me so swiftly a scream spilled from my lips and I stumbled back, the door flinging open as a cat ran out. It stopped, gave me a hiss, then scurried off and out of sight. My heart was racing as I lifted a hand and placed it over my chest, staring at that damn stray.

Once my heart rate slowed, I took a step inside and glanced around, not even sure what I was looking for. Despite this outbuilding not being used any longer, there was hardly any dust, and the scent of must and age were absent since the nuns were meticulous in making sure it stayed clean.

I saw a shadow pass by the far left window, and I moved toward it and glanced out at the grounds. Peering outside didn’t show me anything but a few feet of manicured lawn and the wrought-iron gate that surrounded the convent.

I was about to turn around when I heard the creak of the door shutting behind me, and a second later heavy afternoon shadows surrounded me. I spun around, assuming maybe the wind had shut it, but when a dark figure stood just across the way, a squeak of surprise spilled from my mouth and I took a few steps back.

It was only when my eyes adjusted to the dimness that I realized it was Dmitry, his immense body blocking out the only escape, the menace pouring from him so tangible I felt it snake across the small interior and wrap around me.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out. I didn't know what to say. I wasn't exactly shocked to see him in front of me. I was curious how he'd gotten through the property with no one seeing him, though. The Sisters seemed to know what everyone was doing.

But then I reminded myself this was Dmitry. He was probably used to being stealthy as hell.

Neither one of us said anything as he took a step closer. I moved one back, not sure why I was retreating. It wasn't like there was anywhere to go. It was the fact that I didn't really want to escape. I liked being in his presence, feeling his big, burly body pressed against mine.

He was hard where I was soft. He smelled spicy and woodsy, whatever cologne he had subtle and not nearly as arousing as his natural scent.

And then there were his tattoos, ones I could see sneaking above the collar of his shirt and past the cuffs of his shirt.

Danger and violence certainly had a beautiful face.

"How did you get in here?" It was a stupid question. I knew that as soon as the words left my lips. And I didn't actually expect an answer.

He didn't grace me with one. He just kept stalking closer until I found myself pressed against one window, his colossal body looming over mine, my head cocked back so I could look into his face.

The survival part of me whispered I needed to keep this man in my sights. He was far too dangerous to do otherwise.

"I gave you a day," he finally said, his gaze raking over my face, then dipping down to my breasts before slowly trailing up my throat to look into my eyes again.

Although I was completely dressed, my skirt falling below my knees, my socks covering my calves, and my blazer buttoned up tight, I felt completely naked under his appraisal.

“A day?” My voice sounded far away and hazy, everything around my vision blurry except for the man standing right before me. “You gave me a day for what?” I asked again when he had yet to respond.

The corner of his mouth kicked up, but it wasn’t a humorous smile. It was as if he’d been waiting for me to ask so he could be bluntly honest with his answer.

“To come to terms with the fact that I’m not letting you go, *detka*.”

My heart was beating a mile a minute, and I felt beads of sweat line the valley between my breasts and the length of my spine.

Electricity moved between us. The surge ignited all over my body to the point the follicles of my hair tingled with awareness. Just having Dmitry so close, not even touching me, was like I’d wrapped my hand around a live wire.

And I welcomed the electric shock it gave me.

“For five fucking years you wrote me. I had zero interest in you for those first three and saw you as nothing more than Amara’s kid sister.”

Realistically I knew it was good he didn’t see me as anything more. But my heart, I realized now as he stood so close and said these things to me, broke a little that he’d seen me that way.

He took a step closer, and I felt his body heat seeping into me.

“And then you turned eighteen, your letters getting more personal, the pictures you slipped inside so fucking modest and innocent, yet it made my cock harder than the fucking cement that surrounded me. I knew I had to make you mine.”

My head fell back against the glass, making a soft *thud* that filled the small interior.

“I knew it was wrong to desire you the way I did, to think of the things I did.” He stroked my cheek. “In the middle of the night I’d grip my cock and think about fucking you while I jerked off.” His voice had gone lower, deeper on that last part.

The image of him lying in that prison cell, thinking about me as he found his pleasure, was a heady sensation inside of me.

I canted my hips, seeking something that only he could give me. My breasts rose as if I had no control over my body. The mounds felt so heavy, the peaks so tight as they scraped against the cotton of my bra. I’d never felt such combustible sensations and emotions moving through me.

His enormous body shuddered as he inhaled at the base of my neck again, and then reached out to loosen my blazer, then pop free the first two buttons of my blouse. Dmitry pulled one side of the crisp material down and dragged his tongue over my collarbone.

God, that was hot.

The wet glide along my flesh was more sexual than anything I could have ever imagined.

“Look at me.”

I pried my eyes open, not realizing I’d even closed them. Dmitry’s presence just had that effect on me, where all common sense and rationality flew out the window. Hell, it had probably gone right out the one behind me as soon as he stepped inside the shed and closed us in together.

When I looked up at him, all I saw was intense need reflected in his gaze. His jaw was tight, with dark scruff covering his cheeks and chin. I found it immensely sexy that this man was reining in his control. *Because of me.*

And then as if everything happened in slow motion, he sank down. My heart beat overtime, faster than I even thought possible given it already felt like a racehorse lived in my chest cavity.

“W-what are you doing?”

He looked up at me with fire burning in his gaze and let his fingers skate over the backs of my legs, up my thighs, and tightened the digits around my pleated skirt.

My inner muscles clenched, shooting a shock wave of unadulterated lust straight to my center.

“Getting a proper taste of you.” His accent was thicker, his voice deeper.

I should’ve told him no. This was so wrong. I felt this rush of power as I stood above him, looking down as he knelt before me. I felt like his queen.

But he didn’t lift my skirt right away. He leaned in and buried his face between my legs and inhaled deeply, a harsh rumble leaving him that had a little mewl leaving my mouth.

God, this man. He was so powerful and big, and I felt so weak around him.

I placed my hands on his shoulders, the muscles so tight and firm underneath his jacket. I wanted us naked, bodies pressed together. I wanted to feel the power I knew lay just underneath his veneer of civility, breaking away as he thrust inside of me to find his pleasure.

And I wanted to give him that. I wanted to be the vessel that he took out his sexual need on, that he filled up.

Holy shit. I wanted that so badly.

"*Jesus*, baby. You smell so good." His face was still buried between my thighs, my panties and skirt blocking him from *really* getting in there deep. And I realized I wanted that desperately, so much that I started parting my thighs a little. The material of my skirt slipped farther between my legs, and he leaned in more, pressing his face tighter against my pussy.

He rumbled again and murmured, "You smell just like mine."

I moved my hands and gripped the windowsill as he slipped his fingers back down to the hem of my skirt and slowly pushed it up. He was meticulous, as if he thought I'd tell him no or maybe stop this. That was the furthest thing from my mind.

Dmitry pulled back and our gazes clashed as he inched the fabric higher and higher until it rested on my hips. He didn't say what he wanted, but I knew exactly what to do—I gripped my skirt, keeping myself bared to him as he finally tore his focus from my face and looked at what was revealed.

I could feel something shift in him, changing to become volatile and dark and dangerous. And I latched on to it. It absorbed into my skin and made me liquefied.

When he leaned in again to bury his face between my thighs, I felt his hands grip my ass cheeks, his fingers digging into the flesh so hard it hurt in the best of ways. He pulled the flesh apart before letting them fall back into place, the mounds shaking from the sudden motion.

I knew there'd be marks tomorrow. I wanted proof of his ownership on my body. I wanted everybody to see that I was his and he was mine.

God, my thoughts were ludicrous, but I couldn't stop them. They were a freight train that had derailed.

He looked up at me, his hand tensing on my thigh. There was an unspoken communication passing between us. He was asking permission, but then I also knew he wasn't. I knew this big Russian would do whatever he wanted, and God did that turn me on.

When I said nothing, he groaned, dragging his tongue across the center of my panties. I should've felt humiliated, knowing I was soaking wet, my arousal smearing across his face. But he kept nuzzling me as if he wanted that, as if he wanted my scent to be smeared all over him.

My fingers were wrapped around the material of my skirt so tightly my bones ached. I was afraid if I let the fabric drop, he'd stop his erotic torture.

"Ask me nicely to lick your pussy."

A tortured cry left me, and I bit my lip so hard I felt the skin break, tasting the metallic tang of blood.

Dmitry lifted his hand and smoothed the pad along my bottom lip. He pulled his hand back and held the finger between us so I saw redness smeared across it. While holding my gaze, he brought his thumb to his mouth and sucked on the digit, licking his skin clean and groaning deeply.

"Oh my God. You didn't just do that." I hadn't meant to say that out loud, but the way he grinned and winked was like a vise on my muscles.

"So sweet, *detka*.

"Ask me." His voice was a demand, a dominating whisper of fingers along my flesh. Fingers held on to me tightly, bruising me, showing me he was the artist and I was the canvas.

"I can't." I breathed those dual words, too embarrassed to say what he wanted even if it was on the tip of my tongue.

I may have thought about them as I touched myself and envisioned Dmitry touching me, but I'd never uttered such words in my life**.** Actually saying them, especially in front of Dmitry… I couldn't do it.

Could I?

I turned my head, humiliated at how sheltered, innocent, and naive I was.

I felt a firm grip on my chin, and then Dmitry was turning my head, our faces only an inch apart. His nostrils flared, and he had this angry look covering his face.

"You don't hide from me. You don't feel shame with me. Understand, *kotenok*?"

It only took me three heartbeats before I nodded and licked my lips. His gaze dropped to my mouth, and he groaned. I felt so high I was touching the sky.

"I want you to lick my pussy." I closed my eyes, my face on fire. And although I was so embarrassed by saying the obscene word—feeling almost childish because I was a twenty-year-old woman who felt shy about it—intensity and heat still settled right between my legs. I was throbbing and pulsing, as if a second heart beat wildly between my thighs.

“*Khoroshaya devochka*.” *Good girl.* He sank to his haunches, my skirt still gripped tightly to my waist. Without teasing and tormenting me any longer, he ran a finger down the center of my pussy, slipped his finger under the edge of my panties, pulled them aside, and dragged his tongue from my hole to my clit.

He rumbled out a pleased noise and opened his mouth fully, suctioning it completely over my pussy as he drew on my flesh hard enough a loud moan spilled from me.

“*Ya ub'yu lyubogo muzhchinu, kotoryy k tebe prikosnetsya. Ya yedinstvenny dlya tebya, detka. Vsegda*.” *I’ll kill any man who touches you. I’m the only one for you, baby. Ever.*

The way he spoke those harsh, almost aggressive Russian words against me, had me hurtling toward an orgasm. I was there. So close. Right at the edge.

He lifted my leg until the knee was bent, my thigh pushed outward. On instinct I pressed it to the wall and kept it there so I was nice and open for his devouring mouth.

As if Dmitry knew what I needed, he teased my opening with a thick digit before sliding it in, making me take the entire finger at the same time he sucked on my clit so hard I saw stars.

It was too much. I was too sensitive. I tried pushing him back, but he growled and nipped at my flesh and renewed his efforts until I submitted.

“Look at you,” he purred against my soaked flesh. “So loud the Sisters are gonna hear and be fucking scandalized.” He sucked me harder and pulled one of my pussy lips open with a finger on the side. “Let them hear. Let them know I’m fucking you with my mouth and getting you off.”

I bit my lip so hard the slight wound from earlier bled again.

“Suck,” he demanded and thrust two thick fingers inside of my mouth. I tasted myself on those digits and drew them in, dragging my tongue over them until I finally exploded for Dmitry.

I was vaguely aware of him groaning and cursing in Russian, and it drove my climax even higher.

When I was spent and felt unsteady, he gently lowered my leg back to the ground and stood. I was enveloped in his arms and rested my forehead in the center of his chest as I felt him stroking my hair.

His heart raced.

He cupped me between the legs, and I rose on my toes, my lips parting as a breath of air slid out of me.

“Tell me who owns this.” His tone was hard, demanding. He almost seemed… angry.

l gripped his shirt, my eyes closed, my breathing erratic as I slowly came down from my high.

“Fucking tell me who owns this pussy.”

“You,” I breathed out, that lone word leaving me before I even knew I was saying it.

He slid his hands to my ass and squeezed the globes. A soft moan left me.

“And this?”

“You,” I said instantly. He hummed in satisfaction.

Dmitry slid his hand up my back, over my shoulder, and gripped my chin. He leaned in, his lips hovering over mine as he breathed out, “And this mouth? Who does it belong to?”

I shuddered against him. He smelled like me, and I found that highly arousing.

“You.”

He brushed his lips back and forth over mine, not really kissing me. I wanted to beg him to do just that.

“Say it.”

My heart drummed a hard beat as I opened my eyes and stared into his turbulent blue ones. He looked fierce, possessed, and still so angry.

I realized he was barely hanging on to his control, his cock hard and huge as it dug into my upper belly.

God, he was so tall and burly.

“I belong to you.”

He shook his head before I could finish. “No. Say it how I want to fucking hear it.” Dmitry’s voice was right by my ear, his breath fast and warm, his body pressed fully to mine so I felt all the hard lines that made him so powerfully dangerous.

“My pussy,” I whispered, still embarrassed to say something so vulgar. He groaned and ground himself against me, rolling his hips and digging his hard erection into my hip.

“Keep going and tell Daddy all the things I want to hear.”

I was frozen in place at hearing him call himself that again. Daddy. It shouldn't have sounded as dirty as it was, and it most definitely shouldn't have made me wet all over again.

"My ass and… mouth—" I moaned involuntarily when he kept rolling his hips, when I inhaled and all I could smell was Dmitry. "It's all yours."

He cursed and started licking and sucking at my neck, along the side of my throat, and up to the corner of my mouth. He was panting like he'd run a marathon, and I felt light-headed and drunk all in the same breath.

"*Ya khochu trakhnut tebya, kak svoyu shlyukhu*." *I want to fuck you like my whore.*

I didn't know what he said, but something dark and dirty coiled in my belly and exploded outward.

He bit my earlobe, and I moaned.

Dmitry buried his face in my neck once more and inhaled, his massive body shaking.

"Someone will come in. Someone might see us." Had I said the words out loud? They roared in my head but sounded distant on my tongue.

"Let them," he growled against my ear. "It'll just show them you're mine."

We stayed like that for long moments until I heard my name being called by one of the nuns.

I tensed, and he chuckled, giving me a soft kiss on the side of my throat before pulling back. Instantly I was chilled and wrapped my arms around myself.

Dmitry watched me for a long moment, his pupils dilated, and ran a hand over his mouth as he let out a gruff sound.

He took a cell out of his coat pocket and slipped it into my hand, his fingers lingering against my skin and igniting me all over again.

"You'll keep this phone with you at all times. You need me, you call. No matter what."

I didn't know how to take in that information as I looked down at the cell.

"No matter what." His voice was hard, dominating. It was clear he expected me to comply.

Not that I would have denied him. I'd long since thrown reason and rationality out the window where he was concerned.

With one more soft kiss to my lips, he was gone, leaving me standing there with my soaked panties stuck to my pussy, my heart still racing, and the world having gone upside down in just a day’s time.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 34

CLAUDIA

I hadn’t even been given enough time to say goodbye… to anyone. Not that I’d made a lot of friends while in Vermont, but I’d been friendly over the last six months with everyone I’d worked beside when I volunteered, Jacob included.

Although truthfully I didn’t feel any guilt or remorse for just disappearing. Not that I’d had a choice, but Vermont and the convent had never felt like anything more than a temporary solution to a weighing problem hanging over my head.

A speed bump in my conflated, confused road that was my messy life.

I stood in what was once my father’s office, back on the East Coast, and felt like this heavy weight was in the center of my belly and growing bigger the longer Gio stayed silent.

I’d been picked up at the convent, took the six-hour plane ride back home, and now here I stood, staring at my brother as he leaned against his leather chair and ran his thumb along his chin.

Back and forth. Back and forth.

It was his tell, the one thing he hid well enough, but every time he did that motion, I knew he was pissed, anxious, or both. He was absolutely on edge.

I’d eaten on the private jet, bit my nails almost down to their cuticles because I was so damn anxious, and the silence wasn’t helping shit.

“Just spit it out,” I finally said, the sound of the grandfather clock down the hall ticking down the seconds filling the room so loudly it grated on my nerves. “I know you didn’t call me home for a social call.”

His jaw clenched, his eyes hardened, and he set his hand on the desk, tapping his fingers on the polished wood. “Show respect, *sorellina*. I’m your capo.”

I was the one to clench my teeth now.

“I’m still getting pressure from Carmine,” Gio finally spoke again. “And I’m not able to hold the Heads of Italy off anymore.” He leaned forward and looked at something on his phone, gave a harsh grunt of disapproval, and then reached for his tablet pen to write something down on the screen in front of him.

I watched him do his masculine scrawl, saw the way he looped his letter *A*… just like I did. How funny something so minute had made me feel closer to him as we’d grown up. Now I just felt cold and lonely.

Once he was finished, he leaned back again and pushed the tablet away. I shook my head even though he hadn’t said anything else. He exhaled, clearly frustrated. But not as much as I was.

“I won’t fucking do it.” The curse was out of my mouth before I could stop it, and my face heated with the shame I’d spoken in such a way in front of Gio.

“Damn, Claudia,” Terzo, our cousin and an enforcer for Gio, said with amusement.

Terzo sat on the couch in front of the fireplace, leaned back with an arrogance I saw time and time again with all the men in the *Cosa Nostra*.

I shot him an annoyed look and promptly looked back at Gio. “I won’t. I’ll run, Gio. I’m not doing it.” The words were a rapid flow of words mashed together and thrown at Gio like a weapon. I was on the verge of crying because I was so pissed.

“Let’s talk about this, Claudia—”

“No.” I took a step back, and Gio slowly rose, placing his hands flat on the table and leaning forward.

The look on his face was all capo. No one said *no* to him. I stared at his knuckles, ones that were scabbed over and busted up. Now that I was looking a little closer, I noticed a bruise shadowing the side of his neck. It was hard to make out because of his tattoos, but I saw it.

“Claudia,” he said in a tone that made me feel like he saw me as a child throwing a tantrum. “Sit down and relax. I’ll explain how all of this is going to go. I promise it’s not as bad—”

“I said no.” I turned and left before he could say anything else, my feet carrying me fast down the hall, past staff who hustled out of my way, and right out the front door.

I heard Gio shout my name, followed by Terzo cursing. One of Gio’s men patrolled the property close enough to hear them, and he tensed, taking a step closer. I cut him a deadly look, but he kept coming until he placed a finger against his ear. I knew there was a tiny microphone that connected him to the rest of the guards and to Gio.

His mouth moved and he stopped, no longer advancing.

I had the burner phone Dmitry had given me in my hand, about to call him. I didn’t know where he was, but I had to hope he’d followed me here. If what he’d said was true—that I was what he wanted—I knew he wouldn’t still be in Vermont.

That should have terrified me, knowing I had a certifiable stalker, but I didn’t care. A feminist I was not.

My fingers shook as I flipped the phone open, but before I could push the speed-dial button that would call Dmitry, a sudden flash of headlights came from the left. A big, black SUV came barreling out from the side and stopped at the bottom of the front steps of the house.

The driver’s-side door opened, and I tensed, ready to run if Gio thought having one of his lackeys get their hands on me was going to stop the shit show I was currently throwing myself into.

But I froze when I saw a familiar big Russian emerge and slowly walk around the front of the SUV as if he wasn’t on *Cosa Nostra* territory with probably a hundred guns pointed right at him.

I looked over to where the guard still stood, and when he took a step toward Dmitry, I saw the Russian’s mouth move. I was too far away to hear what was said, but when the guard swallowed and took a step back, I felt a wave of relief. Whatever Dmitry had said, I was pretty sure it included bodily harm.

“*Priv’yet, detka*.” Dmitry grinned and opened the passenger-side door.

I glanced back at the house, knowing Gio would come out any minute. I didn’t think, just tore off down the patio steps and into the car.

Once Dmitry was back in the SUV and pulling away from the house, I couldn’t help but wonder how the entire situation had been weird as hell.

The guard hadn’t apprehended me. Gio and Terzo had had plenty of time to reach me outside. And then Dmitry had been at the house when I

hadn’t even called him.

I glanced at the Russian, the dashboard lights slightly illuminating his profile. He made the interior of the huge vehicle seem small with how much space he took up.

With one hand curled around the steering wheel and the other resting on his thigh, he looked like he was just going for a nice leisurely drive, not like he’d just taken me away from my brother, which would most definitely be seen as a betrayal and act of war.

“Gio is going to marry me off.” The words spilled out before I could censor them. I looked out the passenger-side window. “Well, he’s trying to. I told him no. That’s why I ran.” The adrenaline was still coursing through my veins. My hands shook and I felt restless.

I felt this tightness fill the interior and glanced at him. Dmitry said nothing in response, and he wasn’t staring at me. But his jaw was clenched.

“Did he say who you were marrying?”

I licked my lips and shook my head but felt stupid because he wasn’t looking at me. “No. I didn’t wait around to find out. I just—”

“Ran.” He glanced at me and smirked, but looked back at the road before I could read too much into it.

I glanced behind me, out the back window, but the road was dark and no one was following us. I was mulling over it all, confusion filling me, when I heard a vibration a second before Dmitry pulled his cell out and answered.

“*Da*,” he said in a low, even voice, as if he had all the time in the world.

I noticed his knuckles tighten ever so slightly on the steering wheel.

“I’ll handle it.” His jaw clenched and he cast a side-eyed glance my way. “I said I’d fucking handle it.” He murmured something low and hard in Russian, grunted as if confirming something to whomever was on the other end, and disconnected the call. He tucked the phone into his pocket, and silence fell between us again.

I must have fallen asleep, because when I felt the vehicle slowing, I glanced at the dashboard clock, seeing only twenty minutes had passed since we left my childhood home.

Dmitry pulled the SUV to a stop in front of the entrance of a hotel, glanced at me for a second, then reached out and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.

“Stay here, *malehnkaya ptichka*.” He was out and heading to the main entrance before I could say anything.

Once he disappeared inside, I let my head fall back on the seat, rubbed my eyes, and felt jet lag and the rush from earlier weigh down on me. I didn't know how long I sat like that, rethinking everything Gio had said and where I was in my life right now, until the passenger-side door opened and a wave of panic filled me.

But when I saw Dmitry standing on the other side, a dark look of concern on his face, I exhaled in relief.

"You think I'd let anyone or anything touch you?"

I shook my head right away. "It's just nerves. Tonight's been… interesting."

He watched me with silent contemplation before making a deep sound in his throat and stepping back. He held out his hand. "Come on. Let's go to the room."

I had so many questions running through my head, ones I knew Dmitry had answers for but would probably never cop to.

Once in the room, the door clicked shut behind us. Dmitry stood at my back, his heat washing away the chill from the outside that had clung me.

The light hadn't been turned on yet, but there was a glow from the moon coming through the single window in the room. A second later he turned the light on and a soft yellow glow illuminated the interior. I glanced around. The hotel was on the ritzy side, the room lavish with a king-size bed that sat in the center of the room, the duvet damask patterned and expensive silk.

There was a dresser across from the bed, a TV sitting it. There was a little desk off to the side with a chair in front of it, and a chaise on the far end of the room with the lamp beside that.

Dmitry walked past me, his arm brushing against mine, his fingers skating across the back of my hand. I knew he'd done it on purpose, and I felt that familiar heat move through me. This man had a choke hold on me.

I watched him for a moment as his immense presence filled the room. He was intimidating and menacing. When he turned around, I was taken aback once more that danger was truly beautiful.

"Why don't you go take a shower, baby? I'll order us some food and have things brought up for you."

I didn't argue, didn't even say a word as I did what he said. Once in the bathroom, I leaned against the door and rested my head on it, closing my eyes and breathing out.

I was exhausted, but I still felt that prickling sensation of desire along my arms before it settled right between my thighs. And all by just being in his presence.

It was only after I was done with my shower, my hair smelling of honey and lavender, a fluffy white towel wrapped around my body, that I realized I didn't have a change of clothes.

Ever since leaving the house, I hadn't been thinking about much of anything.

"Come on out, *detka*. I have some clothes for you."

It was as if he'd read my mind. I don't know why I was so nervous. He'd eaten me out just the night before. The memory caused a shiver to race up and down my spine.

I stepped out of the bathroom and stared at Dmitry, feeling so damn nervous suddenly.

"I didn't see you after the…" The words lodged in my throat, my mouth refusing to finish forming them. My face flamed at the memory of the last time I saw him.

In the shed, with him on his haunches, his face buried between my thighs as he ate me out and I came all over his mouth.

And he knew what I was thinking about, where my thoughts had gone by the look in his eyes.

When he didn't respond right away, I tightened my hands around the towel.

Dmitry sat in the small rolling chair by the desk, a bottle of vodka sitting beside him and already opened. He stared at me, his gaze lazily going from the tips of my toes to the top of my head.

I felt goose bumps form along my skin, my nipples tightening, my body preparing itself for something only he could give me.

"I know, *detka*. There wasn't time with… everything."

I didn't know what that meant exactly. I could assume, of course. But I didn't voice any of that. Instead I stood there in just a towel, now realizing there were two large bags sitting on the mattress, an expensive brand I was familiar with scrolled on the front.

"How…" I didn't have to finish my sentence because I knew he understood what I meant.

How the hell did you get clothes already?

How the hell did they get here so fast?

How the hell did you know my size?

Instead of asking any of that, I glanced at him from underneath my lashes, and watched as he slowly leaned back in the chair, the shadows still seeming to wrap around him even though the room was illuminated.

I didn't miss the way he ran the pads of his fingers over his knee. Back and forth. Back and forth, as he took in my form, not even trying to hide how he looked his fill of me.

"Go change, baby. The food will be here shortly. And then we should talk."

That last part sounded ominous, and I didn't know why I felt this cold rush move over me and squeeze my heart. I had a bad feeling about whatever he wanted to tell me, but could it be any worse than the shit I was currently in?

I pushed all of that to the back of my mind, grabbed the bags, and went to the bathroom to change.

Inside one of them were a few pairs of jeans, panties and bras, and a couple shirts. The other one was hygiene products and sleepwear.

I was shocked at the little things he'd gotten me, things like the same brand of lotion, shampoo and conditioner, and perfume I always used.

The undergarments weren't the cheap six-pack wrapped in plastic. No. These were expensive and satin, and my exact size.

I felt a flush of heat at the idea of Dmitry specifically asking for these items. I didn't know if he had or not, but I wanted to imagine he purposely told whoever had shopped that he wanted these things.

I wanted to imagine it was because he envisioned them wrapped around my body just so he could tear them off.

Once I was dressed in a pair of form-fitted, soft pants and an oversize sweatshirt that hung off one of my shoulders, I padded back out into the room.

There was a spread of food on the desk, take-out bags on the floor. Dmitry was scooping out food onto a plate, but he paused, glanced over at me, and tipped his chin toward the bed. I walked toward it silently.

Obeying like a greedy bitch who wanted to please him like he'd been pleasing me.

Legs crossed and hands in lap, I sat silently as he walked over with a big paper plate filled with Italian. Pasta, meatballs, and a little side salad covered it.

“Thank you,” I murmured. “For the clothes, the food.” I glanced into his blue eyes. “For everything.”

This softness covered his expression, easing the tension around his eyes. He ran a thumb along my bottom lip. I breathed out, my body shivering. God, that felt good.

“Anything for you, *kotenok*.”

He gave my mouth one more slow touch before walking back to the desk and taking hold of a bottle of water. He handed it to me and grabbed himself a plate and the bottle of vodka, and sat beside me. He got comfortable, toeing off his boots and stretching his long, muscular legs out in front of him, crossing them at the ankle. I couldn’t decide if he was more attractive in a three-piece suit or the casual attire he was currently sporting.

Because the dark jeans, equally dark T-shirt, and the black leather jacket he’d just taken off certainly weren’t helping my libido.

I let my gaze move along his arms, all those tattoos covering his flesh from the back of his hands and slinking to disappear underneath his shirtsleeves. But I could see the ink sneaking out from the collar of his shirt.

“Eat, *detka*.” His voice was soft and gentle, and it moved through me like a warm blanket, settling over my body until I realized I was doing exactly what he wanted.

I hadn’t realized how hungry I really was until I was nearly done eating. But I felt a sense of calm and safety being with Dmitry, settling into me.

Several feet separated us, yet all I could think about was moving closer and pressing my body to his. His masculinity to my femininity.

He turned on the TV, the volume muted, some news station plastered across the large screen. We finished eating in silence, but I was highly aware he was right next to me, and it wrecked me in the best way.

My body didn’t seem to care about the night's events, not as my pussy became wet and warm and soft as I replayed how he’d touched me.

I glanced over at Dmitry, but he was focused on the television as he ate silently. He acted and appeared so unaffected—that was until I glanced down at his lap and could see the massive, hard outline of his erection pressing against his jeans**.**

He set his empty plate aside and reached for the bottle of vodka, taking a long pull from it as he stared at the TV.

I looked at where his pulse beat steadily at the base of his throat. Was he as aware of my presence as I was of his?

I set my plate aside, too, and felt this flare or something strong and dark and deadly weave in me. There was this sharp sting of strength that moved through me, telling me to do what I wanted and not worry about anything else.

Dmitry pulled the bottle away from his mouth, and I reached for it. I curled my fingers around the neck, our fingers brushing for only a second.

If he was surprised by my actions, he didn't show it as he watched me bring the mouth of the vodka bottle to my lips and take a long pull from it, our gazes staying locked.

The vodka was sharp and strong and burned all the way down my throat. I coughed, my eyes watering. I was embarrassed I couldn't handle it, but Dmitry's heady-hooded gaze told me he didn't care. He looked at me as if not doing so would be the most painful thing he'd ever experienced.

I pulled the bottle away and felt a drop cover my bottom lip. I dragged my tongue across it. Dmitry watched the act, a hard noise leaving him.

For long seconds we didn't speak. The sound of our breathing grew shallower, faster, filling the hotel room.

"*Podoydi syuda, Kotenok, i sydi ko mne na koleni*."

I loved hearing him speak, grew wet and needy at the sound of those aggressive Russian words wrapping around me.

"Come over here, Kitten, and sit on my lap."

My heart was pounding so hard. Could he see it? Did he know how much he affected me with just a look on his face and a lazy command spilling from his lips?

When I didn't move right away, he leaned back against the headboard, spread his legs slightly, and reached down to stroke his enormous erection obscenely.

"Be my *khoroshaya devochka* and do what *Papy* says, *printsessa*."

And that's how I found myself crawling over to Dmitry, a growl spilling from him, and straddling him like I knew what the hell I was doing.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 35

CLAUDIA

I sat on his lap and suddenly felt my courage falter. My hands on his chest, the feeling of his heart beating hard and fast beneath my palms, made mine stutter.

I lowered myself fully onto him, the immense length of his erection pressing right against the center of me.

A soft gasp left me from the sensation. It was like he had an iron rod between his thighs, intimidating and a little frightening, but my body softened even further.

The brand-new satin panties I wore were already soaked. The very idea of trying to fit Dmitry inside of me caused a dangerous need to spread through me, one that I knew could lead to addiction.

It would hurt. A lot, and not just because I was a virgin. I knew even if I'd been with a man before, Dmitry was built differently.

But despite the discomfort I knew would seize me, I wanted him to keep pushing inside of me, forcing his way deep into my body until he bottomed out and all I felt was him.

He didn't move, wasn't even touching me. He had his hands on the mattress beside my knees, his expression stoic.

The only way I knew he was as into this as I was, was the fire reflected in his blue eyes and the throbbing of his cock between us.

I swallowed, licking my dry lips, the shot of vodka I'd taken rushing to my head.

I'd never done actual hard liquor before. The only thing my parents ever allowed was a few sips of wine during dinner every now and again.

And I’d never had the desire to feel that heady sensation of intoxication claim you and wash away your inhibitions.

But I wish I’d taken one more shot, just another sip to send away the uncertainty and trepidation.

I shifted slightly on him, which caused my pussy to rub against his length. His body tensed further beneath mine, and a soft sound left me as my clit throbbed. I swore he grew impossibly harder.

“What are your plans now, *detka*?” His voice was a husky rumble that pierced deep into my core and squeezed tight.

Honestly I had no idea what I was going to do. I didn’t know *what* I was doing. But he’d wanted me on his lap, straddling him, and that had that little flame burning inside of me flaring once more. But despite him commanding me to be in this position, it seemed I had control.

“I don’t know,” I whispered and wished I’d kept my inexperience to myself.

Being a virgin in all things sexual was coveted in my world, guaranteed when you were sheltered and locked away. I had to assume it was the same with the Bratva. But I wished I’d known what I was doing, how to please Dmitry so I could bring him just as much pleasure as he had brought me.

I looked down between us, his dark belt buckle flashing under the light as if taunting me to be stronger. Braver. I looked up at him, seeing how tight his jaw was, how his nostrils flared when he inhaled.

Looking at his hands showed me the veins were standing stark under his tattooed skin. He grabbed the sheets before relaxing his grip.

Clenched his fingers and relaxed them.

To say it was a heady sensation to know I held this much power over Dmitry was an understatement.

“Be my *khoroshaya devochka* and take it out.”

The rough timbre of his voice had my inner muscles clenching and a fresh wave of wetness spilling from me. I couldn’t hold back my moan, which had him squeezing his hands again, his knuckles white. With shaky fingers, I undid his belt, popped the button, and slowly slid the zipper down.

The denim parted, and I saw an inch of black briefs below. Above that was nothing but hard, tattooed flesh, a hint of that V-shaped muscle peeking out.

“Touch me, Claudia.”

I loved hearing him say my name. I loved his endearments and the gruff Russian he groaned against my ear.

His accent was thicker, deeper, and I placed my hands at the hem of his shirt and slowly pushed it up, revealing more of that defined abdomen covered in dark ink.

Roses and skulls in intricate detail covered his body. On his side was a beautiful Russian cathedral. Each of his shoulders showed nautical stars.

There were knives and guns, and violent-looking pictures of death and blood splattered across his chest. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, artwork that was carved from desperation and survival.

I traced each one, wondering at the significance to them, their story.

I let my nails skate down his chest and watched his abdomen flex, his six-pack becoming even more prominent.

My breasts felt heavy, more sensitive than I'd ever felt before. My nipples were tight, hard points pressing against the soft material of the shirt he'd bought for me.

I was braless, and I wished I would've put one on, an extra barrier that would tame some of this sensitivity that coiled tightly in me.

"Touch me before I lose my fucking mind, *detka*."

Although I was touching him, I knew what Dmitry wanted, what he was *really* asking for.

I found my fingers curled around the elastic of his briefs, but I froze, so unsure in that moment of what the hell I would do, how I'd make him feel good.

I lifted my gaze to Dmitry to find his focus trained on my face.

"I've never done this." I breathed the words, knowing they were almost inaudible. "I've never done anything."

"I know," he said just as softly, but there was heat in his voice, arousal laced within those two words.

"I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know if I can make this good for you."

He groaned, and faster than I could expect, Dmitry grabbed my nape and pulled me close. I was off-balance as I braced my hands on his chest, our mouths an inch apart. We breathed the same air. Our hearts ran the same race.

His fingers clenched around the back of my neck, his other one now grasping my waist.

“Leave bruises.” God, the words rushed from me and moved into his mouth. I was unable to stop them, wanted those marks on me so everyone knew I was his.

He grunted and pushed me down on his cock, forcing me to grind against him until I gasped and moaned.

“You could just look at my cock and I’d come.”

I let out a shaky breath and closed my eyes, resting my forehead on his. His words were an aphrodisiac. Gasoline on the wildfire inside me.

“Take me out and put that pretty mouth on my dick, sweetheart.” His words vibrated against my mouth, and I pulled back, looking down at the hard length again. The only things that separated me from him were two layers.

Before I lost my nerve, I gripped the top of his jeans and briefs and pulled them down. He lifted just enough to slide the material down to the tops of his thighs. And then I was staring at his cock.

Oh my God.

He was so thick and long. The head was flared and already smeared glossy with pre-cum.

This was the first penis I’d ever seen in person, and although my fingers shook and adrenaline raced through my veins, it wasn’t seeing Dmitry in all his masculine glory that had me hotter than the fucking equator.

It was the fact that he was pierced.

A barbell went through the end of his dick, right behind the flare of it. The silver was topped with twin balls on each end, and the longer I stared at his cock, the more clear fluid seeped from the tip.

“I meant what I said,” he groaned, gripping the base of his shaft with his hand and squeezing. “You keep staring at it and I’m going to come.” He dragged his palm up the length, pushing out more pre-cum. My mouth watered, wondering how he’d taste on my tongue.

I was pretty sure he could read my thoughts easily given my facial expression, because I felt his hand on the back of my head, and a second later he was pushing me toward the crown.

I adjusted myself and moved down his big body, my palms on the mattress on either side of his thighs, his hand holding his dick straight up so it pointed at my mouth.

I felt his fingers stroking the back of my head almost lovingly. But this moment certainly didn’t seem gentle or sweet. It felt wicked and wild, like I

was about to throw myself over a cliff and had no idea how I'd land.

"Tell me you don't want this, and I'll just hold you all night."

I lifted my gaze to his, biting my lip. He groaned and moved his thumb to my mouth, tracing the seam before pulling the flesh down and letting it move back into place. I darted my tongue out, dragging it over the digit. His mouth parted and he rumbled out deeply from his chest.

And then I sucked him into my mouth, licking that finger like I wanted to do to his cock. His hand was still in my hair, now tight in the strands. He pushed his thumb deeper into my mouth, and I swirled my tongue around it, sucking, biting gently.

"That's it, *detka*. You do that to my cock." I sucked harder on the tip and he groaned. "Just like that." He pulled his finger out of my mouth, and I looked down at his cock. It now rested against his belly, hard and long, the head slightly red from all the blood flow. The tip went past his navel, clear liquid smeared across his six-pack.

I curled my fingers around the root. God, he was so thick that my fingers didn't touch. I clenched my inner muscles, and when I relaxed, I felt wetness slip from me.

"Go on. Lick me like a *khoroshaya devochka*."

I closed my eyes and breathed him in. He smelled spicy and dark from his cologne, with a hint of the soap he used, and an aroma that could only be linked to him. I dragged my tongue over the flared tip, dragging the muscle over his piercing, and licked up the salty flavor of my Russian that coated my tongue.

A fierce growl left him, and I felt more empowered. I envisioned his cock like an ice cream cone melting on a hot July day.

I dragged my tongue up and down the length, over the end, and sucked the crown into my mouth.

"More," he snarled and gripped my hair so tight a flash of pain slammed into me. But that discomfort soon morphed to pleasure, and I moaned around him, pressing my tongue gently into the slit of his cock and stroking my hand up and down his thick shaft.

He wedged his thighs between my legs, and I pressed down as I rolled my hips, working myself over him as I gave him head.

He started lifting his hips, meeting me as I sank my mouth down on him. The tightening of his hand on my hair pushed me farther down until

the crown hit the back of my throat. I gagged and my eyes watered, and he let up slightly, giving me a second before repeating the process.

"*Sosi menya silneye. Glubzhe. Vozmi vse*." *Suck me harder. Deeper. Take it all.* He lifted his hips, forcing his dick back down my throat.

Tears streamed down my cheeks and my throat felt raw, but I'd never experienced such need and lust before.

After a few seconds I started sucking him off with more fervor. The Russian curses that spilled from him made me feel high. His cock swelled in my mouth, and I knew I wanted to swallow every drop he'd give me.

But when I slipped my hand down to cup the heavy weight of his balls, he grunted and pulled me off with a firm yank of my hair.

His cock slipped from my mouth and slapped wetly against his stomach. He was breathing so hard as he stared at me. With his hand tangled in my hair, my neck was tilted back, my throat arched, my breasts were thrust out. I was so hot I wondered if he could feel the heat.

"What you do to me," he murmured and squeezed his hand in the strands before pulling me forward and slamming his mouth onto mine.

He fucked me with his tongue and lips like I wanted him to do with his cock in my pussy.

"Tell me what you want." He nipped at my bottom lip, our mouths still pressed together as we shared the same air.

I looked into his eyes that were more black than blue now, the pupils eating the color and washing away any of the light that clung to him. I didn't need to think about what I wanted.

I knew what I needed, and only Dmitry could give it to me.

"I want you to fuck me." A suspended moment passed after I spoke, those words hanging between us heavy and thick. And then a surprised cry left me when I found myself on my back, Dmitry all but tearing at my clothes so they were nothing but tattered material and ripped seams all around us.

"Those were new," I said in mock shock.

"I'll give you my Black Card to buy more. There's no credit limit. Buy the whole fucking store, baby." He looked at me lazily. "Just so I can tear them off all over again."

Now lying in nothing but panties, my nipples puckered even more under his appraising stare.

He knelt above me, his dark gaze moving over my breasts, along my belly, and stroked over my satin-covered pussy.

He hummed low in his throat, and with a grip of his hands on my waist, flipped me onto my belly.

I gasped and shifted, but he slapped my ass hard enough I buried my face in the pillow and moaned through the heat and discomfort. Dmitry smoothed the sting away and gave the other side a firm spank. More smoothing of his palm over my ass before he repeated the process.

He did this over and over again until I felt liquid beneath him, and only then did he grab my waist and lift my lower half up.

Ass up, face down, and his knee wedged between my thighs to push them wider, I felt bared fully despite my panties still on.

He gripped my hips painfully, pulling my ass back, his face now right between my thighs. Dmitry nuzzled me, moaning, slapping my ass cheek and then squeezing the flesh.

I could hear him inhaling, and it was such an obscene act that I actually pressed back farther, grinding myself against his face.

He slid his mouth over my bottom, took each side of the underwear, and slid it in between the crease. And then he bit one plump mound, not hard enough to break the skin, but there was still that sting that went straight to my clit.

His other hand was kneading my flesh, spreading the cheek before letting it fall back into place.

With the sound of fabric rending, and the dig of elastic against my waist, my panties were torn off.

I was panting as I looked over my shoulder to watch him bring the material to his nose. He inhaled deeply, groaned, and then shoved them into the back pocket of his pants. His cock was standing straight, pointing right at me lewdly.

He stroked himself from root to tip three times before giving my ass one more slap. My ass burned and my pussy tingled.

And then he was between my legs again so he could lick and suck at my pussy. He drew one lip in, gently scraped his teeth across it, then let it go to do the same to the other side.

He pushed his tongue into my hole, and all the while he kept my cheeks spread open for his devouring mouth.

“This is the first one,” he growled against my flesh and sucked that little bundle of nerves into his mouth, humming around my flesh until I exploded so suddenly it even took me by surprise.

I was grinding myself against his face, not even caring how shameless that it was. It felt too good, so right.

“The first of many tonight, sweetheart.”

Before I could collapse onto the bed, he flipped me onto my back, my legs falling open once more, any kind of muscle control leaving.

I should’ve been embarrassed at how displayed I was, but the look on his face as he stared at my pussy had any kind of self-consciousness fading to the back burner.

He quickly undressed, showing off a chest that rivaled any Greek god chiseled out of marble. He knelt between my legs, and I felt like this tiny doll compared to him. God, Dmitry was rock-hard everywhere.

“Spread more, *detka*.” I’ve never heard his voice so deep, so thickly accented before. He ran his tongue over his bottom lip, his focus trained on my pussy. And so I gave him what he wanted.

“That’s my good girl,” he purred when I obeyed. He gripped my ankles and trailed his hands up my calves, his nails gently scratching my flesh.

Goose bumps formed along my skin, and I shivered, feeling a trickle of arousal spill from my pussy and move down the crack of my ass.

He growled, his fingers tightening. “I want you to say it.” He was staring into my eyes, all molten lava, fire and brimstone burning behind his blue gaze.

I knew what he wanted. I wanted it too.

“I’m yours,” I said with no resistance. He started licking me, eating me out until I felt delirious.

I tangled my hands in the short strands of his hair, gasping and moaning, knowing I’d come again.

But when I was right on the precipice, about to go over the edge of euphoria, he backed off and dragged his tongue along my inner leg, that little crease where my leg and pussy met.

He moved lower to my inner thigh, his stubble scraping along the sensitive skin as he sucked on me. I knew he was leaving his mark, a red and purple hickey so close to the most intimate spot of me. His brand of ownership.

“This is the second one,” he said and sucked my clit again, causing me to come right away.

Dmitry pulled back when I relaxed against the bed, panting, and murmured something in Russian. With my legs spread, he gripped them and opened me wider, pushing them back so my knees were pressed to my abdomen.

I held my breath as he gripped the base of his cock and brought the tip to my entrance.

He did nothing for long seconds but watch himself run his cockhead up and down my slit.

“So wet for me, *detka*.”

And when he notched the head at my entrance, I curled my hands in the sheets, bracing.

I bit my lip just as he pushed the tip inside. He was so thick, the burn instant.

He kept looking between my face and where he was buried, as if making sure I was all right, but also not able to pull his focus away from what we were doing.

Sweat covered my body as he pushed in another inch, and another.

It hurt, but the pain led the way to something stronger. I was finally being with Dmitry, giving myself over to him. Who knew my big, strong Russian had a softer side, one where he took my virginity gently, slowly, and asked continuously if I was okay.

He pushed in another inch, and I reached out, placing my hand on his defined abdominal muscle, stopping him as I panted.

Our gazes locked. The feeling of being so full, of him stretching me, splitting me in two, had this heavy feeling settle in my chest.

“It’s too much,” I groaned from the sensitivity, from the intensity. “You’re too big.”

Dmitry leaned in, his mouth pressed to my ear as he said, “*Mozhesh vzyat bolshe. Vzyat vse*.” *You can take more. Take all of me.*

He gave me a second to let those foreign words sink in. I didn’t know what he said, but I exhaled and nodded anyway, telling him without words I wanted more.

He rested his forehead against mine, and on a groan he pushed the rest of himself deeper into me.

“*Jesus*. That’s it. Fuck, *malehnkaya ptichka*. You take me so good. My good girl. Mine.”

He kissed me hard and thoroughly while he dragged out, the tip lodged in my pussy, before sinking in deep. We both made strangled noises at the same time.

He repeated the process, and after long minutes he pulled back and looked down where we were connected. I felt wetness along my inner thighs, wondering if it was just my arousal or if my virgin blood mixed with it.

The grunts and groans, the Russian words he said as he watched himself fuck me, were such a turn-on. I pressed back against him, needing him impossibly deeper.

“You’ll come for me,” he demanded, his thumb on my clit as he rubbed slow circles around it. “And you’ll fucking give it to me now.”

And that I did.

My body wasn’t my own any longer, with my back arched, my nipples aching, and my head tipped as I closed my eyes and rode the wave.

Feeling Dmitry slamming into me as he retreated, pushing in and pulling out, had my orgasm climbing so high I reached the fucking stars.

Blood rushed through my ears, and I couldn’t hear anything but my erratic heart beating.

“Look at me, *detka*. Look at me as you’re fucked for the first time.”

I opened my eyes and stared at him, my vision blurry.

He gripped my neck, a hand necklace that settled and calmed me, pushing my pleasure even higher. With slight pressure around my throat, he pulled me up so we were nose to nose.

“Look at me as you come, knowing I’m the only man who will ever fuck you.” He added more pressure to my clit, rubbed faster circles around it, and I came again.

I was dying, surely, because nothing could feel this good unless you were leaving this world.

When the orgasm dimmed and I sagged against the bed, my thighs falling open on either side, my strength gone so I wasn’t even able to hold them up, I felt a smile tilt my lips.

Dmitry hummed, still so hard inside of me I knew he hadn’t come.

He leaned in, his warm, vodka-scented breath moving over me a second before he dragged his tongue over my lips, licking me like a lazy lion

giving attention to his mate.

“Watching you come is better than if I got off myself.” He kissed me long and slow, then started fucking me the same way. “If I could just fuck you all night, watch you come undone for me repeatedly… It would be the best fucking pleasure I’ve ever felt, sweetheart.”

I got lost in the sensation of what he was doing to me right now. He’d just been fucking me. Now he was making love to me.

I should have known that wouldn’t last long.

“You didn’t—” My words were cut off with a sharp intake of breath when I found myself flipped over, now straddling Dmitry’s waist.

I stared down at him, all male prowess and masculinity. I felt so feminine, so soft compared to him.

“Ride me like my *khoroshaya devochka.*”

He was still buried inside of me, and I slid my hands up his sweaty chest to rest my palms on his pecs. His heart was racing. Just like mine.

I didn’t know what the hell I was doing, but then he lifted me up and pulled me back down on his length. I followed his lead.

Soon I was moving up and down with no help, feeling that stretch deep in my core. Dmitry placed his hand on my belly as he watched me fuck myself on him. I looked down, too, seeing how glossy his cock was, tinged with pink from my innocence.

“You’ll be mine in every fucking way, Claudia.”

I snapped my gaze to his face at the intensity of his voice. His fingers pressed against my belly.

“Every. Single. Fucking. Way.”

I made a soft sound, a brief panic welling inside of me because I knew what he was implying. But on the sharp heels of that panic, I felt something deep and hard and so encompassing that another climax rose in me so swiftly it took me by surprise.

Eyes wide before they slowly closed on their own, I wasn’t aware of anything but rolling my hips and pressing my pussy down on him. I ground myself on him, rubbing my clit on his lower abdomen, using him to get off.

He snarled something, a curse that barely reached my ears.

It was only a heartbeat after I came down from the pleasure that he pressed his fingers against my waist. He lifted me before slamming me back down on him at the same time he thrust up.

It was his turn to use me.

And that he did.

His movements got more erratic, jerky. He rose, slammed his mouth on mine, and pressed me down on his cock fully. He groaned against my lips and swept his tongue past the seam as I felt his cock swell.

“I hope I get you pregnant tonight.”

His orgasm went on and on as he filled me to the brim. I wasn’t thinking about how we hadn’t used protection or Dmitry’s words about getting me pregnant.

I knew I should have been terrified by that… a declaration that meant so much. They meant everything.

He wrapped his thickly corded arms around my body and just held me as he sank back to the bed, so I was lying on top of him like I was his own personal blanket.

I tried to roll off him, but his arms tightened around me and he murmured huskily against my ear.

“Not going anywhere, *detka*. Gotta make sure every drop of my seed stays right where it needs to.”

I shivered, too sated and drowsy to fight him on this. But truthfully I didn’t want to. Foolish maybe. But right now I didn’t care enough. I was euphoric at finally having Dmitry as mine.

Warmth spilled from my thighs, and I rested my face on his chest, inhaling the scent of him. “Your cum is making a mess between my legs.”

He groaned and buried his face in the long fall of my hair before he slid his hand between my legs, gathered his cum, and pushed it back inside.

I didn’t know how long we lay like that, but with a groan he finally rolled me off him, only to pull me in close again.

Chest to chest, he pushed the hair from my face before stroking the back of my head so gently, looking at me with this soft expression. It went against how hard he was in every other aspect of his life.

“Probably better have that talk now, huh, baby?”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 36

CLAUDIA

"Okay," I whispered, feeling all that euphoria leave me after hearing Dmitry's words.

I felt very vulnerable as I pulled away from him and brought the sheet to my chest, covering my breasts. He sat up and braced his back against the headboard, the same sheet pooling low on his waist, his abdomen clenched tight and so very defined.

I had to look away because I started feeling heated all over again, looking at all that hard, tattooed skin, his scent surrounding me, covering every inch of me. My gaze dropped to his hands, then up his forearms.

With the light hitting his arms just right, I could make out the long, crisscrossed scarring underneath the ink, snaking from his wrists to his inner elbows.

I wondered how he got those, but a part of me already knew. Childhood trauma ran rampant in the *Cosa Nostra*, and I had to assume it was the same for the Bratva.

Although I knew nothing about him, I suddenly wanted to learn every little secret he kept deep down, the things he would never share with anyone because it would seem like a weakness.

And God forbid anyone saw him as anything but invincible.

When I focused back on his face, he was already watching me, a stoic expression covering the hard, masculine planes of his face, his eyes shielded.

Learning this man's secrets would be like breaking into a safe with no tools, blindfolded, and your hands tied behind your back.

"What do you want to know? Where should I start?"

There was no change in the tone of his voice, and I wondered how easy it was for him to shut off his emotions. As if it were a light switch he flipped to let his darkness consume him and wipe away any trace that he'd been in the light.

"I want the truth," I said as he reached out and curled his arm around me, pulling me in closer, as if he couldn't stand to have me a few feet away.

He inhaled so harshly I felt his chest rise and fall hard against my side.

I didn't think he'd answer because the silence stretched on, but when I felt the air change, I knew he'd give me what I wanted.

"I knew where you were after I was released because I had you followed."

I knew as much.

"Wanted to make sure no one fucked with you, that I could find you as soon as I got out."

There were so many questions in my mind, but I stayed silent.

"I'll always know where you're at."

I tilted my head and looked at him, seeing he was watching me intently.

"I knew Gio called you home because I'd made sure things went my way."

My brows knitted in confusion, and I forced myself to pull away, to keep the sheet to my chest, a shield that did nothing to protect me from the darkness and war that was Dmitry. Those dual things I knew were a part of his very DNA.

"And I was supposed to be there tonight, *detka*. I was supposed to be in that office and kissing you in front of your arrogant brother, so he knew this wasn't just a deal for me."

I held my breath for a second as his words sank in.

"Look in my eyes and know that is the truth." He cupped my face, smoothing his finger along my cheek. "The truth is, I'd burn the fucking world to the ground and level anyone who tried to keep you from me, family or not." The fierce look in his eyes had a shiver racing up and down my spine.

He was silent as he looked at me, letting his words sink in and penetrate me.

"This is all so confusing. It's hard to wrap my head around it all." I glanced away, unable to hold his stare for another second. He made me feel

bared, my skin torn from my body, so he saw the inner workings of what made me… me. “I don’t understand any of this,” I whispered to myself.

“Yes, you do, sweetheart.” He let his hand fall back to the bed. He must have seen any confusion I had fade.

“That’s right, *malehnkaya ptichka*. I was the man you were arranged to marry.”

My heart stopped, then started again. It was so painful. I placed a hand against my chest to calm it, to ease the sudden sharpness.

“Gio told the guards at the house to stand down and not interfere. Not like anyone would have stopped me even if your brother hadn’t said so. I would have destroyed them if they tried to keep me from you.” Dmitry’s tone changed, lowering, becoming so cold and silent I felt it suffocate me.

“I… but why me?”

“I called your brother as soon as I was out, as soon as I was in Vermont and had made sure you were okay.” The air heated after that. “To see you in the flesh after wanting you for so fucking long.”

Although I’d just gotten off multiple times, my body sore in the best way, it heated at those words.

“I let Gio know what my intentions were. I’ll give him credit. At first he thought he could deny me what I wanted, but he and I… we have an understanding and agreement. In the end he gave me what I wanted with little fight.”

That sounded more ominous than it probably should have. Then again, in our world everything was laced with acid, deception, and violence.

Maybe he saw the confusion twirling around me. Of course, I understood him, his words making sense, but the *why* of it… that’s what I didn’t understand. I didn’t just want to be some notch on his bedpost, an obsession, an itch he needed to scratch before he tossed me aside.

Yes, he wanted me. That much was obviously clear by the marks on my body and his cum leaking from my pussy. But he’d been locked away for five years, admitted he wanted me for the last two of those. Celibacy could make anyone crazy. Right?

I hadn’t expected anything more than what we were doing. Even if my young, foolish heart always wanted more, I never expected a marriage.

“Why me?” My face heated as those two words spilled from me. I hadn’t meant to say them, and certainly didn’t feel like I was inadequate for

being desired by Dmitry or married to him. But this was all happening so fast that I couldn’t wrap my head around it.

“Because, Claudia.” He moved closer and curled his tattooed hand around my throat, gently squeezing as he pulled me in close. Our lips were only inches apart when he breathed out, “*Ty moyah*.”

And then he kissed me hard, possessively, and fucked me nice and slow, just how I wanted it.

Just like he did.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 37

CLAUDIA

We landed in Desolation, New York, half an hour ago. Dmitry had been quiet and contemplative on the plane ride over, but he'd also been staring at me so much thirty thousand feet in the air that it had felt like a physical touch.

A big, dark SUV had sat idling on the runway of the private airstrip. A burly-looking beast of a man with a shaved head, almost no neck, so much muscle mass he was built like a tank, and a scowl that rivaled Dmitry's stood in front of the vehicle's grill.

Dmitry had spoken to him in Russian, calling him Ivan, and handed off our bags. And then he'd chauffeured me away from the jet and to my future. Wherever that led.

The flight had been long, and although we hadn't talked much, when I was awake, I'd been content to sit there and just stare at Dmitry as he worked on his phone or took phone calls, murmuring in husky Russian that caused me to clench my thighs in desire.

I'd napped off and on, but every time I'd woken, it had been to see Dmitry either resting his forearms on his thighs watching me or sitting beside me. If it was the latter, he'd have my legs over his thighs, his hand gently massaging the insole of one of my feet as he scrolled his phone.

That nonsexual touch shouldn't have turned me on the way it had, but all I could think about was how gentle he was one minute, and the next he was fucking me like a god of the underworld.

And I knew he could tell how turned on I was. I hadn't made it a secret as I bit my lip and crossed and uncrossed my legs, hoping to entice him to

join the Mile High Club with me. But he didn’t take the bait. I should have been relieved since it wasn’t like he hadn’t fucked me two ways to Sunday already, and I was pleasantly sore all over.

I’d been thrust into this weird sense of an alternate reality, one that I always fantasized about but never thought I could experience myself. And it all seemed to move at light speed that broke the sound barrier.

I’d listened to him bark out orders in English, ones that were violent, and speak about death and gore. I had to be messed up in the head to get wet while Dmitry stared at me as he talked in the calmest voice about cutting out a man’s heart who’d fucked him over.

Before we’d taken off, I’d missed several calls from Gio. I’d ignored them up until take-off, and couldn’t lie and say I wasn't relieved he hadn’t answered.

I knew I’d have to face him eventually, but I was thankful for the small reprieve from having to deal with it now.

A part of me felt guilty for how things had gone down. I didn’t want to worry him, but I also knew he was aware I was with Dmitry. My Russian mobster had confirmed as much the night before.

Gio and Dmitry may have made a deal for an arranged marriage with me, but it was still forbidden for me to be with Dmitry, unchaperoned, before the nuptials.

So no doubt Gio was pissed about that on top of everything else.

But I couldn’t find it in me to care about my brother’s rules with the *Cosa Nostra* and its archaic traditions.

There was this thunderous storm cloud in me just waiting to open up and flood everything.

I glanced over at Dmitry, who sat quietly beside me in the SUV. I worried on my bottom lip as I continued to stare at him, knowing I should be asking a million different questions, but somehow nothing spilled out.

My phone pinged with an incoming text, and I reached into my pocket to grab it. A small smile curved my mouth when I saw it was from Amara.

AMARA

Nikolai told me everything that’s going on. Are you okay?

I should have known she’d been told everything. I was relieved.

CLAUDIA

I'm fine. I promise.

AMARA

Gio is an ass. I don't think I've been this upset with him before.

Another smile touched my mouth, and a familiar warmth filled my chest. Amara might only be five years older than me, but she'd acted like a mother far more than our own ever had.

CLAUDIA

No. He did everything he could to help me out of a shitty situation the first time. And to be totally honest…

I stared at my phone, wondering if I should tell her I was in love with Dmitry and this was what I'd wanted for way too long. I wanted to look in her eyes and tell her I was pretty sure I'd been in love with him since that first letter I sent all those years ago.

I cast a sly glance at Dmitry, knowing being tired wasn't just about my mental well-being and a lot to do with the three times Dmitry had fucked me last night.

CLAUDIA

I know how things are in our world.

I left it at that, not wanting to tell my sister something so profound over text.

I thought back to how I'd acted when I spoke with my brother. Not my finest moment with Gio, and I could have handled things differently.

AMARA

Everything will work out. I'm not about to have you thrust into something you don't want. I don't care who it's with.

CLAUDIA

We'll talk soon.

I sent off that last text before I slipped the phone into my pocket and rested my head back on the seat. I felt the heavy weight of Dmitry's stare on me and let my head loll to the side so I could look at him.

Dmitry wore this closed-off expression, but like he always had when he looked at me, there was this softness in his eyes and a steady burn of embers in the blue depths.

"*Ty takaya krasivaya. Inogda mne bolno smotret na tebya*." *You're so beautiful. It's hurts my heart to look at you sometimes.* He touched my cheek and I shivered. "*Ya ne zasluzhivayu tebya, no chert vozmi, yesli ya otpushchu tebya*." *I don't deserve you, but fuck if I'll let you go.*

The light from the late morning sun wasn't able to soften the hard edges of him. Darkness loved Dmitry too much.

He stroked my cheek, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. He'd done that so many times since he came back into my life. He said so much without saying a single word.

Just a touch of his hand on my body, a gentle kiss on my lips before he slipped his tongue inside, told me I was his.

We entered Desolation and I was still shocked to see how the name fit the city so absolutely. Even being here many times when I'd come to see Amara over the years couldn't lessen my distaste for the underbelly that this city was.

Dirty sidewalks, graffiti-covered buildings. Sketchy men loitered in darkened alleyways, and homeless individuals were spread out along the sidewalks.

A lot of the businesses were closed, run-down, or boarded up. But as if I blinked and it was nothing but a bad dream, we were leaving the city that stank of death and despair and entering the more luxurious one.

Once out of Desolation, the city turned into wealth. It was now reminiscent of the swanky streets of Rodeo Drive in California or Fifth Avenue in New York.

With one more stroke of his thumb along my cheek, Dmitry dropped his hand and went back to doing work on his phone.

I hadn't asked where we were going. I just assumed since we were in Desolation, we'd be seeing Nikolai and Amara.

And I couldn't lie and say I wasn't happy about a reunion. It had been far too long since I'd spent time with my sister.

"I shouldn't avoid Gio," I said to myself, but I felt Dmitry's heavy hand land on my thigh, a weight that was comforting in its silent solidarity.

"It's understandable. But you won't be avoiding him for long," he whispered, tucking his phone back into his coat pocket and saying

something in Russian to Ivan. The driver gave a gruff, “*Da*,” and then the vehicle dropped into silence once more.

I hadn’t actually brought up the whole arranged marriage situation again, even though that was the logical thing to do.

“What exactly are we doing in Desolation?” Ridiculous for just now asking, but my mind had been preoccupied with other things.

I glanced over at him. Dmitry’s focus was already on me. “We have important things to do here, *detka*.”

I wanted to ask what exactly that meant, but gauging his reaction, I knew I wasn’t going to get any answers. He had a sly expression on his face, this secretive gleam in his eyes. It made me feel tingly and on edge.

Another five minutes passed, and then we stopped in front of a courthouse. A nasty-looking stone gargoyle sat atop an outcropping over the front entrance.

Ominous.

Even more confused, I glanced at Dmitry. “What are we doing here?” He was silent for several seconds, then slipped his hand behind my neck, pulled me in, and kissed me deeply.

He stroked the seam of my lips before plunging his tongue inside. I couldn’t help but melt against him.

My hands found purchase on the expensive material of his suit, my fingers curled around the lapels. I opened my mouth wider, and he sucked my tongue into his mouth, stroked the roof, and groaned harshly.

I didn’t even care that Ivan was an arm length away. It seemed whenever Dimitri was in the vicinity, all common sense in the world itself faded into oblivion.

He broke away, both of us breathing heavily, and gave me one more soft kiss before he dragged his thumb along my mouth, his focus trained on the act. “We’re getting married, *detka*.”

Holy shit. What?

Before I could have him repeat that or ask if I’d heard him correctly, Dmitry was out of the vehicle and striding around to the passenger-side door to open it for me.

With my hand in his, we entered the building. The waiting area was packed with frazzled looking people, crying babies, screaming kids, and enough frustration filling the air that it was uncomfortable.

A young man scurried out from behind the front desk and said something low to Dmitry that I hadn't picked up on.

We were shown to the back right, and I was pretty sure Dmitry didn't have an appointment. So I could only imagine his name and reputation stretched far and wide.

"Wait," I said and pulled him to a stop. Dmitry turned to face me, his big body blocking out everything behind him.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, *kotenok*."

I shook my head and licked my lips. "I'm not afraid, it's just…" I glanced around his body to see a few people eyeing us warily. Or should I say, eyeing Dmitry with clear trepidation on their faces.

"I don't think I heard you correctly." I closed my eyes and shook my head. "Did you say we're here to get married?" I stared up at him. "Like, you mean, you and I getting married? Here? Now?"

He tightened his fingers in mine, stroked his thumb over the back of my hand, and I saw the curl of his lips as he smirked.

"You're serious?" I whispered.

"Dead fucking serious, sweetheart." He leaned in so we were nose to nose. "So serious that I'm not above throwing you over my shoulder and chaining you to my side as we do this." Although his tone was serious, there was a small tilt to his lips.

"I—I didn't know how to feel about this." Getting married in a courthouse, on a spur of the moment, after I'd just been told Dmitry was the man I'd been arranged to marry, certainly wasn't how I envisioned my wedding going.

Then again, my life had always been a series of crazy, sometimes unfortunate events.

I stared at the man I'd had a crush on, then lusted after, and finally fell in love with. I'd felt things for him for five years.

He was the only man I'd ever wanted to tie myself to.

"Gio won't approve of this."

His smirk grew, and I could see he knew I wouldn't stop this.

"This is so crazy," I breathed, and he cupped my cheeks and planted a soft kiss on my lips before taking my hand again and leading me down the hall.

We stopped in front of a closed door, and with a quick turn Dmitry opened it.

I stepped inside but froze when I saw Nikolai and Amara standing off to the side.

Amara placed a hand on her slightly swollen belly, my new niece growing safely inside and causing this longing to settle in me.

There was a woman standing beside Nikolai. I'd never met her in person, but I knew who she was. I'd seen a family picture of her with Nikolai and Dmitry at Amara's house the times I'd visited.

This was the third Petrov sibling. Tatiana.

She was young, maybe only a few years older than me. Although I could see the family resemblance to Dmitry and Nikolai in the shape of their eyes and high cheekbones, that's where the resemblance ended. Where the brothers had coal-black hair and ice-blue eyes, Tatiana had long, wavy brown hair that fell to her waist and bright hazel eyes.

My sister wrung her hands and bit her lip, and when her husband noticed she was anxious, he wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her snuggly to his side.

I wanted that. Someday. I wanted the husband who looked at me and touched me with such devotion and love. His possessiveness consumed us both. I wanted a little one to look up at me and call me Mama.

I'd never thought of such things so strongly before, but now… seeing my sister and her family, feeling Dmitry tighten his hand on mine, I knew with such certainty this was what I wanted.

I smiled when I saw Luca standing beside Amara, his little arms wrapped around her legs. "*Scricciolo*. Come, give me a big hug."

Luca glanced at Dmitry. He might have been Luca's uncle, but it wasn't as if he'd ever met in person. And besides, the big Russian was a massive beast of a man who could terrify anyone just by sneezing.

"This is my friend," I said gently and got down to my haunches.

Luca stepped away from Amara and glanced at his parents. Amara murmured something low in Italian to her son and smiled.

"He's my very good friend and your papa's brother."

After hearing that, Luca looked at Nikolai. His father nodded and smiled, and that gave Luca the courage to come forward.

He eyed Dmitry, who slowly sank to his haunches as well. Dmitry said something in Russian to his nephew. Luca looked at Nikolai again, who said something in Russian as well, his voice soft, a tone he only reserved for Amara and his son.

Luca moved a few more feet and stopped an arm's length away from where we were. Luca was a spitting image of his father. In fact, he resembled Dmitry as well, since the brothers looked so much alike.

"You don't know who I am because I was away. But I'm back now, and we have all the time in the world to get to know each other." Dmitry held out his big tattooed hand, scarred and tanned, to Luca.

When Luca edged toward me, I said softly again, "He's my very good friend, *scricciolo.*"

After a second, Luca reached out and slipped his tiny hand into Dmitry's outstretched one. They shook as if they were business partners, and I couldn't help but laugh softly.

Amara held her hand to her mouth, all the love she had for the situation spilling forth so that it filled the entire room.

Dmitry started speaking to Luca in Russian, and although I knew Nikolai spoke it to Luca, and Amara taught him Italian, I didn't think he'd be able to understand as much as Dmitry was speaking.

But I was surprised when Luca answered Dmitry back with a "*da,*" followed by a shake of his head and a, "*nyet*."

Dmitry chuckled and gave Luca a small smile. Whatever Dmitry had said to Luca had clearly broken the ice.

Dmitry ruffled his short black hair and grinned, and a second later Luca was in my arms.

"*Mi sei mancato.*"

"I missed you, too, *Zia*."

And then he was gone and running back to his parents. Nikolai scooped up Luca just as Amara came over and gave me a hug.

"Are you okay?" she asked in Italian, so low against my ear the words were only heard by me.

I nodded, and when she pulled back, she gave me a motherly scowl. Whatever she saw on my face had her expression softening.

"Come on," she said suddenly and turned to grab a bag sitting on the floor by Nikolai, one I hadn't even noticed. She started leading me out of the room.

Dmitry blocked the exit. "It's too late to get out of it now, *detka*." I would have thought he was being an overbearing caveman, but I saw the tightening around his mouth and eyes.

He was… scared. He was afraid I wasn't going to go through with this. I knew he'd keep his promise about tethering me to his side and going through the nuptials, but Dmitry wanted me to *want* this, to want him. He didn't want to force me.

"Move it, Dmitry," Amara said. "If my sister is getting married today, I'm gonna make sure she looks the part."

I cocked an eyebrow at my sister, not just because she wanted to pretty me up, but because she clearly didn't care that a muscular six-foot-five Russian mobster was blocking the door.

Nicolai chuckled in the corner, and Dmitry gave his brother a glare. "If Claudia gets a mouth on her after marriage like your wife, I'll have my balls in a jar in no time."

"What's balls in a jar mean, Papa?" Luca's words had the room becoming a little lighter.

Nikolai chuckled again. "It means *dyadya* loves Mama's sister but is too much of a little bitch to admit it out loud, at least right now."

"Nikolai," Amara scolded. "Watch your language, Nikolai."

"What's 'little bitch,' Papa."

Amara closed her eyes and exhaled in obvious frustration. "Something you don't say, baby." Amara looked back at Dmitry and lifted an eyebrow, waiting for him to comply.

His nostrils flared and his jaw clenched. I was pretty sure he was about to cause a scene, so I intervened. I stepped in front of him and cupped his scruff-covered cheeks. I rose on my toes and kissed him. I could tell I'd taken him off guard by the way his eyes widened slightly.

"I'm coming back," I said as I looked into his eyes, my expression showing that what I said was the truth.

"Don't make me wait long, *krasavitsa*." The thickness in his words and the heat in his eyes had a flush spreading through me.

I shook my head, softening against him. After a tense second Dmitry smoothed a thumb over my bottom lip, kissed me softly, and stepped aside. Amara was smart enough not to waste time before he changed his mind.

I couldn't hide my smile as Amara led me across the hall to the bathroom. I noticed Dmitry stayed in the doorway, watching us, before giving me a wicked smile and a little wink.

The bathroom was single occupancy, and when she shut the door and locked it, leaning against it, that fierceness came back into her expression.

“First, are you really okay? Like *really* okay?”

I nodded slowly. “Yeah. I really am.” I was shocked to feel how true those words were.

She let out an exhale, as if she had been holding it in, expecting me to say that I wasn’t.

I saw some of her tension fade a second before she said, “Second, if you want out of this, you tell me. I’ll figure out a way to call it off.”

At my cocked eyebrow, she ran a hand down her long, dark hair.

“Okay, maybe not call it off, because we both know men like Dmitry—hell, men like Nikolai and Gio—are nothing more than adult children who throw tantrums when they don’t get their way.”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed. Amara smiled.

“But I’ll definitely get you out of it. Even if that means sneaking you off to another country, so be it.”

I’d never heard this type of fierceness come from Amara before. I knew without a doubt she'd do everything in her power to help me escape… if that’s what I wanted. But it wasn’t. Not in the least.

“He’d just find me,” I finally said, and she made a frustrated sound.

“Yeah, but that still wouldn’t stop me from helping you.” She pushed away from the door and came to stand in front of me. “I love Nikolai. But I don’t care if it is his brother who wants your hand in marriage. I don’t care if it would cause problems between the two of us or the Bratva and *Cosa Nostra*. I’d help you no matter what.”

Before I could stop myself, I wrapped my arms around her, hugging my sister tightly. Although it hadn’t been that long since I'd seen her, it felt like an eternity.

Being sequestered away at a convent for the last six months had made me feel so out of touch with everything I knew and loved.

And the few times we got together over those months during holiday visits hadn’t been nearly enough time.

When I pulled back, she gave me a resigned look, but I knew she wouldn’t press this anymore. If this wasn’t something I wanted, she knew I’d tell her.

I placed my hand on her rounded belly and gave her a soft smile. “Enough about me. How are you? How is my niece?”

Amara didn't hide her smile. She placed her hand right beside mine on her belly. “I don’t know who came up with the term morning sickness, but

they’re full of shit. I wasn’t nearly this sick with Luca.”

“A man probably came up with the term,” I grumbled.

We both laughed.

Although she had exhaustion written on her face and laced in her voice, her happiness and excitement was still tangible.

“But I can’t wait to meet her. Luca is so excited he keeps coming up with different names.” She laughed softly and shook her head. “This week he wanted to name her Bluey.”

I had no idea what she was talking about, but could assume it was from a children’s TV show

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “I kind of like Bluey. Has a good ring to it.” Amara eyed me with skepticism but laughed.

“How did you know about all of this, to be here?”

She set the bag on the vanity and looked at my reflection in the mirror. “I didn't know about the arranged marriage until this morning when Nikolai told me we were going to the courthouse because you were eloping with Dmitry.” She started rifling through the bag.

I wondered if she knew about Fredo. I had to assume Dmitry hadn’t done it alone. I knew the Petrov brothers were thick as thieves.

“Told him that if you wanted out, there was no way I’d let this go through. He just laughed like he knew something I didn't.”

Yeah, that's probably because he knew everything. Dmitry and Nikolai were probably worse than gossiping old ladies talking over Sunday brunch.

She held out the bag that hung from her arm and gestured over to the sink. And then she pulled out a gorgeous white lace dress. I took it and ran my fingers over the material. Amara then pulled out her cosmetic bag and faced me.

“Listen, if you’re going to go through this, I’m gonna make damn sure you’re dolled up.”

I felt tears prick my eyes at how much I loved my sister. I didn’t want to admit to her I probably would’ve had zero problem getting married in my jeans and a holey T-shirt. This was more than lust or infatuation.

I’d loved this man before I even knew what that word was, before I knew how all-encompassing it was.

For the next ten minutes she helped me dress, put some light makeup on me, and even pulled out a Swarovski crystal hair barrette that I knew she’d worn for her own wedding.

She did a relaxed braid on the side of my temple, securing it with the barrette, and then grabbed my shoulders and gently turned me to face her. A tear tracked down her cheek, and I went to brush it away, feeling my own eyes water.

“Oh no,” she said and sniffed, wiping away her tears as if she was angry. “If you cry, it’s gonna mess up all the hard work I just did on your makeup.” We both laughed softly, and then Amara sobered. “I wish Mama was here to see this. I wish she was a better mother.”

That last part was whispered, as if maybe she didn’t mean to say it out loud. I didn’t respond verbally right away, just pulled my older sister in and gave her a tight hug. “Me too. But the only thing that matters is that you’re here.”

When we were composed enough, we headed back into the office, but it wasn’t with instant butterflies in my belly. No, I had this dread settling around me when I saw Dmitry and Gio facing off.

My brother and future husband were nose to nose, both of them so alpha they were spitting nails and butting heads without even saying one word.

I wasn’t surprised to see Gio, not when this was apparently a family reunion. Gio wore a crisp three-piece suit, the tattoos on his neck snaking up the collar of his button-down white shirt and showing who and what he really was.

A savage when need be.

The looks on their faces, the daggers they were throwing at the other just by the gazes in their eyes, had so much testosterone filling the room.

Nikolai leaned against the wall with his arm crossed, a bored expression on his face. Luca sat on the floor by his father, Nikolai’s phone in his little hands as he played a game that kept pinging praise when he’d scored six more gumdrops.

Tatiana had this weird look on her face as she stared at Gio, one that had me lowering my brows because it was reminiscent of… longing.

“Oh boy,” Amara said softly and walked around me to get to where Nikolai was standing.

The animosity coming from Dmitry and my brother left a sour taste in my mouth. This was supposed to be my wedding day, albeit a simplistic one, but the last thing I wanted was family drama.

“Are we really doing this? Right now?” I finally asked.

Gio let out a frustrated growl and turned to look at me, his expression softening. “*Sorellina*,” he said in a harsh voice. “Are you okay?”

His question took me back to when Amara had been shot and I’d left her room to go looking for him. There weren’t many times that Gio let his emotions through. Men like him—like Dmitry, Nikolai, and every other man in organized crime—saw their emotions as a weakness. Such a toxic trait.

But Gio baring that vulnerability to me, especially in front of so many, told me he was genuine.

“I’m fine.” I gave him a smile, one that reached my eyes because I felt Dmitry staring at me.

I glanced at my big Russian, saw the heat in his gaze as he raked it up and down my body. He pulled a shiver from me simply by the way he looked at me.

When I stared back at my brother, knowing if I kept staring at Dmitry, my desire would be visible to everyone. Embarrassingly so.

I could see the guilt and shame on Gio’s face, but a part of me couldn’t find it in myself to hold any kind of animosity toward him. I just wanted to move on.

There was so much I wanted to say. To tell him he should’ve talked to me first about any kind of marriage, especially since he’d been against it from the beginning. But I didn’t need to run off like I had. If things hadn’t worked out the way they had with Dmitry, I could have started a massive war between the two factions, especially since I knew Dmitry would have set fire to anyone who tried to hurt me.

So this shit show was on me, too.

I wanted to thank Gio for having my back. He’d been put between a rock and a hard place, where family and loyalty for the *Cosa Nostra* was concerned.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. Gio’s expression softened, and he gave me a crooked smile.

“I love you, *sorellina*.”

God, I loved my family.

I looked at Dmitry, a fierce possessiveness in his expression directed right at me. When I looked back at my brother, I wanted to tell him I loved Dmitry, that I had for so long.

But I could see the understanding in his eyes, and knew he was aware of it all without me having to say one word.

“This isn’t what I wanted for you,” he whispered and took a step closer.

Dmitry made a gruff sound, and Gio snapped a narrow-eyed glare at him before looking at me once more.

“This isn’t what I wanted for Amara either, even if she is happy.” Nikolai gave a harsh growl, and Gio gave a humorous laugh as he scrubbed a hand over his face. He cast a glance at Tatiana.

Interesting. There was definitely a story there.

When Gio looked at me again, I knew I had to tell the truth.

“I haven’t been honest with either of you. Any of you.” I looked around the room, making eye contact with Amara and Nikolai, then finally staring at my brother. “For the last five years, I’ve been writing to Dmitry while he was in prison.”

There was heavy silence, a thick oppression that suddenly filled the room. I could feel Gio’s anger rising, his mind no doubt jumping to the most heinous things that Dmitry would do to a fifteen-year-old pen pal.

“Before you lose your mind, know that he only wrote to me once before my eighteenth birthday, and it was to tell me to stop writing to him. He told me to stay away, that he wasn’t a good man and I was far too young.”

My statement had a bit of the animosity and violence leaving Gio. He exhaled, tipping his chin for me to keep going.

“But I didn’t listen. I kept writing to him because I wanted to. I won’t lie and say I didn’t have feelings for him, even if I knew nothing could have come about them. But it felt like so much more than that.” I shook my head. “I can’t describe it. Writing to him just made me feel less alone, even if he didn’t communicate back.”

Everyone was so silent, listening to me speak about something that I'd kept a secret for so long.

“I really didn’t have anyone to talk to.” I looked at Amara and saw the hurt on her face. “You had a life, *sorellina*. I didn’t want to burden you when you were making your own path and were finally happy for the first time in your life.”

She covered her mouth with her hand, and Nikolai wrapped his arm around her shoulder, pulling his wife in close to comfort her. She gave me a watery smile in return.

“And then as time went on, he wrote to me again, after my eighteenth birthday. I realized something.” I licked my lips, looked down at the ground, trying to gather my courage because I’d never uttered these words out loud to anybody.

When I looked up, it was to stare at my Russian.

“I realized that I had fallen in love with him, a man I really didn’t know, who I had only seen a few times in my life.” A part of me felt foolish for saying that, admitting those words, feelings a young, naive girl had felt. But now they were out in the open, with everybody able to dissect them, to tear them apart. “But I still knew we could never be, not with…” I glanced at the court clerk, knowing I had to watch my words. “Knowing our families didn’t exactly get along.”

I stared at Dmitry just as he stepped toward me. I could see his hands clasped into fists at his sides, and I knew without him saying anything that he wanted to embrace me.

“Fuck me,” Gio murmured under his breath and went to stand on the other side of the room, where Tatiana leaned against the wall. “I can put two and two together.” Gio glared at Dmitry, letting him know without verbally saying it that he figured it out about Dmitry coming to me, probably about Fredo too.

Tatiana eyed Gio, that same strange expression on her face I’d seen earlier that told me there was definitely something going on there.

And if that was the case, Gio was playing with fire.

My brother was focused ahead, acting as if she wasn’t even there. But I noticed the subtle tightening of his shoulders, how his hands clenched into fists in front of him, his jaw tight.

And a part of me had a feeling it had nothing to do with what I’d just said or what was happening right now, and everything to do with the young woman standing beside him.

And then brawny arms wrapped around me, and the familiar scent of Dmitry filled my lungs. I rested my forehead on his chest and closed my eyes, laughing shakily because yeah, I really said all that.

I’d really been honest. Finally.

He smoothed his hand over the back of my hair and murmured, “You’re the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.” He gave the shell of my ear a kiss, and I could feel the tightening of his muscles pressed up against me. “And I think I fell in love with you, too, *detka*.”

My heart was pounding so hard in my chest it felt like it filled the entire room. He pulled back, cupped either side of my neck, his thumbs brushing the spots right under my ears as he stared into my eyes.

“I’ve never felt anything like this before. This obsession goes far deeper than anything I could even name, anything I could ever explain. If that’s not love, I don’t know what is.”

He pulled back and reached into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulled out a light blue box. He opened the top, revealing the biggest diamond ring I’d ever seen.

I didn’t know what to say, how to react. So I just stared at it like an idiot, my jaw slack.

“I’m sure this isn’t how you saw your wedding going, and I swear to fucking everything I’ll give you the biggest one after all of this, if that’s what you want. But I *need* you as my wife. Today. Right now.” He took my hand and slipped the ring onto my finger.

“Pretty sure you put the ring on *after* she agrees to marry your stubborn ass,” Nikolai murmured and then grunted when Amara elbowed him in the side.

He wrapped me in another hug, then led me to where the court clerk was waiting.

The next few moments seemed to happen in a blur, with the man presiding over the ceremony going through the legal jargon to make this all possible. Everything else faded into the distance as I looked into Dmitry’s blue eyes.

“I do,” I whispered with a smile.

Dmitry was looking at me with so much passion, so much… love, that I felt it wrap around me in this protective cocoon.

I knew this man would tear down the world to protect me.

He cupped my cheeks, dragging his nose along the side of my face, inhaling deeply. He brought his mouth to my ear and murmured gruffly, “*Ty zastavlyayesh demonov vnutri menya sheptat, a ne rychat*.” *You make the demons inside of me whisper instead of roar.*

I didn’t know what he’d said, but I felt how much he meant them.

He slanted his mouth on mine, kissed me so passionately, so deeply it was reminiscent of when he fucked me. I should have been embarrassed that he was all but fucking my face in front of everyone, but I wanted to just melt into him and take it all.

When he broke away, he was breathing hard. “Tonight”—he brushed his lips against mine, saying those words only loud enough that I heard them—“I’m going to fuck you as my wife.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 38

CLAUDIA

We'd all gone to lunch after the ceremony, some swanky French place with a massive crystal chandelier hanging in the center of the large room and everyone dressed like they were going to the opera.

So when I walked in wearing a wedding dress, even a low-key one, I didn't stand out.

The owner came out from the back to greet us, shaking Nikolai's and Dmitry's hands, his grin splitting wide when the two Russians shook his hand. It was clear this man thought the sun rose and set with the two of them.

He led us to a table, assuring us it was the best one in his restaurant, and then snapped his fingers. He had the waitstaff bustling over, pouring artisan water, making sure the place settings were perfect, and then said a slew of French to them that had each of them rushing off.

It all seemed a little over-the-top, but when I looked at the owner's face, I could see him still grinning ear to ear. He clearly liked doting on the two mobsters.

We weren't given menus, but then again, a place like this was five-star, serving four-course meals specially prepared by a chef. Wineglasses were set in front of Tatiana and me. Liquor was poured for the men, and water for Amara and Luca and the rest of the table.

Dmitry wasn't subtle when he pulled out my chair and purposefully pulled it close to his. Our thighs touched, and his heat and the spicy scent of him wrapped around me.

He threw his arm over the back of my chair, the tips of his fingers lightly stroking the bare skin of my arm.

I glanced at him from underneath my lashes, amazed that this had actually happened. I was now Mrs. Dmitry Petrov. I'd never seen myself realistically in this situation, and a flutter of butterflies took flight in my belly. The feeling of euphoria that settled heavily inside of me was what I assumed someone high off opioids felt like.

I picked up my wineglass just as I felt Dmitry's hand slide along my shoulder, over the length of my back, and settle on the top of my leg. He let it sit there for a few seconds before he smoothed his palm down to rest on my knee. And then he pulled my leg open so he could slip his hand between my thighs.

My heart started beating harder and faster with his ascent.

And the entire time he touched me, he kept light conversation with Nikolai. He pushed the fabric of my dress all the way up my leg so he could skim his fingers over my bare skin. I darted my gaze around the table, but no one acted as if anything out of the ordinary was happening.

And the entire time, my husband kept moving his fingers over the edge of my panties, teasing that spot where my leg and pussy met.

I placed my hand on top of his, trying to stop him, but all he did was tighten his fingers against my flesh, letting me know he was stronger, more determined, and this would happen whether I wanted it to or not.

God, that turned me on.

Fire licked across my skin. Being in the middle of a restaurant that was filled with patrons and sitting at a table with my family should've been like cold water on my arousal.

But I realized my mind and body didn't care about any of that when it concerned my husband and him making me feel good.

Two waitresses came by with trays full of the first course. I thought Dmitry would stop teasing me then, but when I went to clench my legs together, silently telling him we couldn't keep doing this, all he did was exact pressure and open me back up.

He ran his finger down the center of my pussy, gently pressing the fabric against my opening.

I bit the inside of my cheek and tried to act normal, like I didn't have his fingers pressing on my pussy.

I tried to hold in my moan by taking long gulps of wine, which had Dmitry smirking and leaning back in his chair like the smug asshole he was.

I put my hand on his again and looked at him, narrowing my eyes, pursing my lips and pleading with him to show mercy on me.

Although he was still talking with Nikolai, he slowly turned his head to look at me, the corner of his mouth tipping up in a smirk, and then winked, continuing on with rubbing his fingers up and down my panties.

Nikolai started speaking with Amara, and Dmitry took that moment to lean in so his lips brushed against my ear. "*Jesus Christ*, Claudia," he growled. "You're fucking soaked for me." He hummed. "I'm going to pull my fingers back and they're gonna be all glossy, isn't that right, *detka*?"

He ran his tongue along the shell of my ear, and I shivered, darting my eyes around the table again to make sure nobody was watching.

My husband pressed his finger to my clit, and I sucked in a quick breath, curling my toes.

"Do you think anybody will notice if I suck on my fingers?"

I was pretty proud of myself for holding off the sound of pleasure that was about to come out of my throat at hearing those filthy words.

I could just imagine Dmitry doing just that, the digits glossy from my arousal, and him sucking on them like he'd skipped to dessert.

My inner muscles clenched with the memory of what it felt like having him inside of me, of how it sounded when he came.

He rubbed his finger on my clit once, twice, and added pressure on the third time.

And then when everybody started eating, he pulled his hand out from between my thighs. While staring into my eyes, my breath lodged in my chest, Dmitry brought his fingers to his mouth and dragged his tongue across them.

My face flamed with embarrassment and something carnal.

Although the atmosphere was light, Gio still acted like he had a stick up his ass. Tatiana kept stealing glances at my brother, and Amara and Nikolai were doting on Luca.

Dmitry had his arm over the back of the chair again. His posture was relaxed, his fingers once again brushing along my bare shoulder. He knew what he was doing by constantly touching me and knew the effect it had on me.

Goose bumps popped out along my arms, and I wasn't ashamed to hope this lunch got done quickly so we could go back to his house, or a hotel, wherever he planned on taking me, so we could actually consummate the marriage.

After long minutes I was able to regain my control, and my body calmed and cool.

Nikolai, Dmitry, and Gio started talking about work, their conversation cryptic and not making any sense to anyone but them.

“As much as you assholes annoy the hell out of me, I won’t lie and say this marriage doesn’t make our union even stronger,” Gio said. He leaned back in his chair and braced his elbow on Tatiana’s chair.

She visibly shifted, as if having him that close unnerved her.

Although I totally understood seeing as Gio was just as much of a tattooed beast as the Petrov brothers. And because she was a tiny thing, it was easy to be intimidated by these men.

Dmitry started talking about something or another, and when I glanced at Nikolai, I could see him staring at Gio with a strange expression on his face. My brows pulled down low just as he turned his focus to me and smirked.

“Claudia,” Nikolai drawled in his thick Russian accent. “Do you know about our fight club business venture?”

I could feel Dmitry tense beside me, but I kept my focus on his brother.

“Nikolai,” Dmitry growled and leaned forward, bracing his forearms on the table and glowering at the other Russian.

“What, *brat*?”

“Enough,” Dmitry bit out.

But it was clear Nikolai wasn’t perturbed by the clear aggression and warning pouring off Dmitry. Whatever Nikolai was doing, whatever he planned on saying, was going to continue whether Dmitry liked it.

Nikolai smirked and cast a glance at Gio before facing me again. “You should check out a fight. It’s pretty fucking incredible entertainment.”

“Language, Nikolai,” Amara chided, but I could hear in her voice this wasn't unusual verbiage for her husband.

“Fucking ya,” Luca shouted, a wide smile on his face as he scored points on whatever game he played.

Nikolai chuckled and looked over at his son, but at the narrowed-eyed look on Amara’s face, he sobered and shifted on his chair.

“Baby, we don’t repeat the bad words you hear Daddy say, remember?”

Luca didn’t respond as he kept playing, which had Amara sighing in frustration and casting another angry look at Nikolai before grabbing her water glass and downing it.

“I mean it, Claudia. Have your husband bring you.”

Dmitry shook his head.

“I’d like to go,” Tatiana said in a low voice, staring at her older brothers, her big hazel eyes wide and filled with anticipation.

Gio didn’t look at her, but he scowled and grabbed his whiskey glass, shooting back the rest of it.

“I thought you said those fights were nothing but a bunch of bloodthirsty savages?” Amara wiped Luca’s face after she spoke.

“No,” Dmitry bit out. “Absolutely not.”

“It’ll be safe, brother.” Nikolai’s brows lowered. “I’ll even bring Amara. She’s been wanting to check one out since the last time she snuck her perfect ass into the underground.” He turned his head to stare at her. “Remember, *kotenok*?”

He leaned in and dragged his nose along the shell of her ear. My sister shivered, and I felt weird watching this very clearly intimate moment.

“I had to kill some assholes who thought they could even look at you.”

Amara slowly blinked and a blush spread across her cheeks. Nikolai kissed her temple before facing his brother, holding out his hands, palms up, before dropping them back down. “See. It’ll be a family outing. We’ll bring in extra security, keep a safe section off for the girls, and they can get an adrenaline rush watching *D'yavol* beat some poor sap to death.”

Dmitry’s jaw was clenched tightly as he squared off with Nikolai, who just smirked like he was having the best time.

“What do you say, Gio?” Nicolai asked, drawling out those words as he smirked at my brother.

Gio was silent for long seconds before leaning back in his chair. “Maybe watching the fights will open their eyes to their world more.”

I was confused by Gio’s cryptic words.

“But don’t think I let this caveman shit fly with my sisters, *Russian*.”

Nikolai sobered instantly, all amusement fading as he stared at Gio. “Your sisters are married. They aren’t under your protection anymore, and you sure as hell don’t make the rules.” Nikolai leaned forward and growled something in Russian before saying, “Don’t think you tell *me* what to do.”

“Okay,” Amara said. “That’s enough. Claudia just got married, and this is supposed to be a nice after-ceremony lunch. All of you are ruining it.” The anger in my sister’s voice was thick, and Nikolai leaned back in his chair, Gio shut up, and Dmitry laughed softly.

And just like that, the atmosphere changed, everyone calmed the hell down, and we had a nice meal.

After lunch, I was eager to be alone with Dmitry. I even assumed he would be too, but I was surprised when he said we would go shopping instead of taking me somewhere private and fucking me.

He took me to so many shops I lost track. He even had one of his men follow us around in another SUV so we had someone to carry all the bags from my purchases.

Although I had money of my own, a card that allowed me to access funds from an account Gio had set up for me, Dmitry refused.

In fact, he told me if I didn’t let him pay for everything I needed, he wouldn’t fuck me tonight. Instead he’d bring me to the edge of coming and deny me. Repeatedly.

And then he’d let me watch him get off.

That threat had been whispered low against my ear, with the sales associate only a few feet away and watching us with wide eyes.

I could’ve called his bluff because I was pretty sure he wasn’t going to deny me, not when I’d beg and plead with him, knowing he got off on it, but I wasn’t about to risk it.

Besides, I could see the actual pleasure on his face when he did things for me, as if he derived pleasure from taking care of me.

And what woman—feminist or not—could say that didn’t do certain types of things to them?

But we *would* be having a conversation later concerning what he expected from me and what I expected from this marriage.

As we left the hundredth store we’d shopped at, I watched him slip on a pair of dark glasses, smooth a hand over the front of his suit, and felt him curl his hand around my waist as he pulled me to his side.

The only thing I could think about concerning this marriage and how independent I was going to be in it was how many times I could get my new husband to fuck me in a day.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 39

CLAUDIA

Later that night, after a low-key, intimate dinner, we found ourselves at the most prestigious hotel in the city.

Dmitry hadn't even said his name at the front desk before the front desk attendant was acting nervous as hell and booking us the penthouse Presidential Suite.

The room was incredible and dripped with luxury, with an amazing view that overlooked the entire city, and had private access to the rooftop pool.

I was suddenly so nervous, which I knew I shouldn't have felt since I'd already been with Dmitry in so many filthy ways in just that one night, there wasn't a part of me he didn't now own.

But this was different. It *felt* different, and I knew tonight would mean something more profound.

A part of me wanted to sit and just talk, to get to know who Dmitry Petrov really was. I wanted to know all his little idiosyncrasies, his likes and dislikes.

Although I knew a large part of his life—the underground part that was dark and villainous—he'd never utter to me, I still wanted to peel away his layers.

I knew, just by looking at him, there was so much to him he showed no one else.

He let me explore the suite, just standing back and watching me, the shadows wrapping around him. Dmitry kept close, the feeling of him only an arm's length away reminding me of what tonight was.

My wedding night.

Once we stood in front of the bed, all thoughts of conversation faded. Especially with the look he gave me, as if he'd been waiting an eternity to have me.

My body was on autopilot as I sank down to the plush settee across from where he stood.

While keeping my gaze on his, he came closer. Not speaking, just moving meticulously.

He undid his cuff links and set them on the dresser. Then he slipped off his jacket and hung it over the back of the chair. Never once did he take his gaze off me as he worked each button from the hole of his shirt. He let it slip off his broad, muscular shoulders, tossing it over the chair with the jacket.

I was gripping the edge of the settee, clenching my thighs, unable to look away.

Watching a man undress should not have been as arousing as it was, yet I was acutely aware of the air that brushed against my bare arms, my nipples pressed against the lace of my dress, and how my panties were soaked clean through.

I was pretty sure what made this even more arousing was the fact that he never broke eye contact, as if he wanted to make sure I was watching him the whole time. As if it turned him on as well to know I couldn't look away.

When he went for his belt, undid it, and slid it through the loops, the *whoosh* that filled the room had a shiver coasting over my spine. He wrapped it around his hand so it was a perfect circle, then set it next to his cuff links and watch.

I looked at his bare hands, realizing he didn't have a wedding ring. I wanted to have that proof of ownership of him as well.

"I need to get you a ring," I murmured idly, my voice breathless. He said nothing as he ran the pad of the digit over his finger.

He made a humming sound as he came closer, his slacks still on, but I realized how hard he was, that impressive length pressed against his pant leg as he stopped closer.

He stood in front of me, my husband so tall and wide that with my sitting position, my face was lined up perfectly with his cock.

I tipped my head back and looked at him.

“My beautiful *krasavitsa*.” He trailed his finger along my forehead and down my temple, tracing my jawline, and then my lips. “You know,” he said deeply as he stared at my mouth and traced my lips. “I would’ve killed your father and his bitch mistress for putting you in danger if they weren’t already dead.”

He kept tracing my mouth, then pulling my bottom lip gently down before letting it move back into place.

“I would’ve avenged you.”

It had been over five years since Francesca and my father had died, but his statement, his declaration that he would’ve taken care of them, ended them simply for putting me in danger, did something completely physical to me. It lit up my synapses, had my throat in a choke hold.

It made me want him to fuck me so hard I felt him tomorrow.

He slowly touched my shoulder, skating his fingers up and down my arm as he circled me. He stopped behind me and wrapped his tattooed hand around my throat from behind. I let my head fall back, the hardness of his erection so close to my cheek that I actually moaned, unable to stop the visceral reaction in me.

With slight pressure, he tipped my head fully back, his hand still wrapped around my neck as he leaned forward and kissed me.

The angle was different, and I wasn’t able to fully open my mouth for his plundering tongue, but as he dragged the muscle across my lips, plunging inside before repeating the action, I couldn’t care about how we were kissing. I just cared that we were kissing.

I wanted Dmitry so badly I could feel it, like a tangible touch all over my skin. He’d fucked me, put his mouth between my thighs. And now I wanted to do something for him, something that would give him pleasure.

I hadn't gotten nearly enough when I tasted him the last time.

When he deepened the kiss and dragged his tongue over my mouth, I moaned, “I want to taste you, Dmitry.”

He stilled, his body tensing, and then slowly let his hands fall from my body to take a step back. I looked over my shoulder. His head was lowered, his focus on me, so predatory that I shivered.

He took another step back, and one more, until there were several feet separating me from him.

And then he undid the button and zipper of his slacks, pushed them down, pulled his huge erection out, and fisted himself.

Although I'd seen him naked before, I felt like every time I saw his body, I'd have this immediate reaction inside of me.

The feminine part of me said this was the most masculine man I would ever meet in my entire life. Broad shoulders, bulging biceps, and a muscular chest so powerful that it was terrifying in the most erotic way. I felt a trickle of wetness slip from my pussy in reaction.

Growing up, all the men who'd come and gone in my life had been covered with dark ink. Insignia that labeled them as part of the *Cosa Nostra*. I'd never found it attractive in the slightest. But seeing it on Dmitry? Seeing him covered from neck to wrist made me want to be this man's whore.

"Stop*, kukolka*."

My body obeyed instantly. His voice was lazy, as was the way he stroked himself. Root to tip, pushing out clear beads of pre-cum so that it dripped down the underside of his shaft to his balls.

Those twin weights shook slightly as he jerked off. His expression was stoic, like he had all the time in the world.

Couldn't he see that I was burning alive? Couldn't he tell I was dying to get him inside of me?

"Get on your knees for me."

My body was a slut for him as I kicked off my heels and gathered my dress. Then I sank to the plush carpet. I waited for my next order.

This was so degrading.

I wanted more.

"You want to taste me, Claudia?"

I loved it when he said my name.

I dragged my tongue across my bottom lip and nodded. I could see the tightening of this jaw, the way he squeezed his hand harder around his girth.

He liked my reaction.

"You want to try to fit this huge cock in that pretty little mouth of yours?"

I couldn't hold back my moan at his filthy words. I nodded again.

"Then be Daddy's good girl and crawl to me."

And God help me, I did exactly that.

I moved to him on my hands and knees, never once taking my focus off his face. I could see his arm flexing as he continued to jerk off.

When I was right in front of him, resting back on my heels, staring up at my big, powerful husband, he growled low.

“That look on your face,” he murmured and stepped closer. “Like you’re hungry and eager to gag on my cock.”

He ran the tip of that huge crown over my mouth, and a soft sound left me as he smeared his pre-cum all over.

“Makes me fucking feral.”

With his free hand, he cupped the side of my face, stroking my cheek with his thumb. He continued to rub his cock in lazy strokes, then moved the cockhead along my lips, smearing all that pre-cum on me as if it were lip gloss.

“Open that pretty mouth for me and suck me in deep.”

I looked up at him, my mouth still closed, the nervousness I felt having my fear spike. I didn’t want to disappoint him even if I had tasted him before.

As if he read my mind, his muscles visibly tensed.

“I want to make this good for you.” My voice was whisper thin as I lifted shaky fingers and gripped his muscular thighs. “I want to please you like you please me.”

He groaned and leaned down, slanting his mouth against mine, plunging his tongue between my lips.

The kiss was thorough, encompassing. And by the time he broke away, I was breathless and leaning forward for more.

“You please me like no one ever has or ever will.” His voice was husky, his face still close to mine. “All you have to do is look at me and I’m ready to come all over the place. Now open up and suck the head inside.”

I parted my lips and did just that, closing my eyes and twirling my tongue along the underside before pressing the tip into the slit of his dick head.

“Eyes on me, Claudia. I want you to look at me as you deep throat me.”

When I opened my eyes, he was staring at me with intense possessiveness. He was barely hanging on to his control. He gripped the back of my head, tangling his fingers in the strands, using that as purchase to push my face down farther.

He was slow and steady with his movements, giving me time to get used to the size of him. My jaw hurt, my mouth stretched wide.

"That's it," he groaned and pushed me down a little more. "*Sosi menya silneye. Glubzhe. Vozmi vse*." *Suck me harder. Deeper. Take it all.*

Although I didn't know what he said, I knew what he wanted. I slid my hands back and grabbed his muscular ass as I forced myself to take all of him.

I tried to relax my throat when I felt the head hit the back.

My eyes watered, tears tracking down my cheeks. I deep throated him. He held still for a moment, my face completely pressed against his body, my mouth filled with him.

I couldn't breathe, just staring up at him, crying and wanted more.

He pulled back, and I breathed through my nose, the head of his shaft lodged right at the opening of my mouth before he repeated the process. I tried to pull back. He was too big.

"No. You don't get to pull away." He gripped my hair and kept my face to my cock. "You open up that throat and swallow." Tears tracked down my cheeks. "Prettiest thing I've ever seen."

I closed my eyes and hummed around him, taking more of his cock until I gagged.

"That's Daddy's good girl."

He held me there for a few seconds, unable to breathe, feeling like I was suffocating in the most erotic way possible before he stopped and slipped back out.

My mouth watered, spit forming at the corners and slipping down my chin like I was some bitch greedy for this man's cock to stuff me.

His pre-cum coated my tongue and spilled down the back of my throat, and I knew I wanted this man to fill my belly with the most potent essence that made him a male.

But he didn't give it to me and instead pulled himself free, his cock slipping from the tight suction of my lips with a resounding *pop*.

He was breathing hard as he gripped his dick again, the length glossy from my saliva.

"You suck my cock so good. No one else pleases me like you do. It'll only ever be you for me, Claudia.

I was off the floor, my dress being all but ripped from my body in his haste to get me naked. And then he had me on my back on the mattress a

second later.

Dmitry then just stood there staring at me, laying there like a sacrificial lamb. He looked the length of my body, his gaze racking over me.

I shamelessly parted my thighs, feeling my inner lips open for him. “Dmitry,” I moaned. “I need you.”

He groaned harshly and took a step forward.

His cock was still glossy from being inside my mouth, but even more pre-cum was lined at the tip, dripping onto the floor. That obscene sight made him seem so virile.

“You need me?”

I nodded, unable to form the words.

“Play with yourself. Let me see how much you want me.”

With one hand cupping a breast, I pulled at the tight peak. Shocks of pleasure speared right down to my pussy. With my other hand, I slipped over my flat belly, along the slight mound of my pussy, then delved between my folds.

I was so wet my arousal slipped down the crease of my bottom and covered my inner thighs. I would’ve been embarrassed that I was so slippery if not for the fact that Dmitry couldn’t take his eyes off what I was doing. I knew how much he was turned on right now.

“Pull your pussy lips apart. Let me see how pink you are.” His voice was almost inaudible, his accent so thick.

It was hard to make out his English. Using my fingers to pull my lips apart, I felt the cool air brush along the most intimate, heated part of my body.

He did nothing but stand there and stare at me, just focusing on my pussy, his hand back on his cock as he stroked himself.

“Dip a finger inside. Feel how tight you are. How hot.”

My body shivered at his command, and I ran the pad of my finger over my pussy hole, gently pressing it inside.

Just the tip.

“More,” he growled.

I pushed inside to the first knuckle, then to the second. Although my finger was slender, the feeling of it still set me off. I moaned and rolled my hips, arching my back, thrusting my chest out.

That seemed to be his breaking point. With a gruff groan, he knelt between my legs, his hands on my inner thighs as he squeezed his fingertips

into my flesh and pushed me open wider to fit his broad shoulders.

"Don't worry, *detka*. I'll give you what you need, but first let Daddy have a taste." He flattened his tongue at my pussy hole and dragged it to my clit, sucking on that bundle of nerves.

He hummed around it before dragging his tongue back down and plunging it inside of me.

My inner muscles clenched around him, and I didn't even care that I was rolling my hips, pressing my pussy against his face so hard I wasn't even sure he could breathe.

"*Jesus Christ*, sweetheart." His voice rumbled against my clit, and I gasped at how sensitive I was. "Your pussy is the sweetest fucking thing I've ever tasted."

He plunged his tongue in and out of me, fucking me like I desperately needed him to do with his cock.

And as if he read my mind—or maybe me grinding my pussy against his face was confirmation of what I needed—he rose above me and ran his palm over his mouth. He wiped away all the wetness from when he'd been eating me out.

While holding my gaze with his, Dmitry dragged his tongue over his palm, licking up all that arousal he'd just wiped off himself.

It was one of the most carnal things I'd ever seen.

"I want it to hurt," he said between clenched teeth as he ran his cockhead over my slit. "I want to fuck you so hard that when you sit down tomorrow, you still feel me. I want the sheets to be sticky from my cum as it slides out of your sweet, perfect cunt."

He kept running his tip up and down my cleft, rolling it around my clit, before sliding it back down and gently pressing into my opening.

My breath sawed in and out of my lungs, and I braced myself on my elbows, looking down the length of my body so I could watch the act.

I was like this tiny doll to this towering beast who'd break me in half.

"You're so fucking wet for me." His voice was low. It was almost as if he spoke to himself as he pushed forward, notching himself at my hole.

Just the tip.

I was panting, my body burning alive, the stretch of where he was making me want it to hurt so good. But then he pulled out. And repeated the action. I was sweating and begging, shamelessly lifting my hips and hoping I could get him lodged deeper inside.

He gave me a slow, satisfied grin.

I realized my husband liked it when I begged for more.

He was between my thighs, and I didn't think he could make the situation any hotter. He proved me wrong as he let a string of saliva go from his mouth to land right on my clit.

That trail of spit slid down my cleft to my opening, and then he thrust deep inside of me. His balls smacked against my ass, and a harsh noise left me from the sudden penetration.

He started moving in and out so damn slowly there was no doubt he liked teasing me more than anything else.

"*Skazhi mne, kto tebya trakhayet*."

I moaned at his primal tone. "English."

"Tell me who's fucking you." He said and grasped my waist. "Tell me who owns this tight little pussy."

I breathed out, "You."

"Tell me who's the only man who will ever know how you feel inside."

I arched my back and groaned as he ground himself against my clit. "You."

"Say my fucking name."

"Dmitry." I cried out when he hit something deep inside.

"And *who* am I, princess?" He slammed his hands onto the mattress beside my head, his hips pistoning back and forth as he continued to own my body.

I looked into his fierce eyes. "My husband."

He groaned and slanted his mouth on mine, rolled his hips, and hit that sweet spot deep inside me again.

"I want to feel my wife come all over my cock. Milk me, *detka*. I know you're hungry for what only I can give you." He nipped my bottom lip, then sucked on the side of my throat.

I knew I'd have a hickey there. I wanted that mark. I wanted them to cover me.

And when he bit the spot where my shoulder and neck met, growling low and causing a spike of pain to ignite in me. I exploded.

I shuddered and held on to him. The sounds that came from me were piercing. And the entire time he kept his teeth latched to my neck, as if he were some beast refusing to let his mate go.

And God, did that make my pleasure soar.

“You make me feel so good.” He slowly pushed in and pulled out. “No one else will ever fucking please me. It’ll only ever be you, Claudia.”

He kept fucking me, prolonging my orgasm until I was nothing but a sated, puddled mess beneath him.

“So fucking tight,” he groaned every time my pussy contracted around him. “You were made to fit me.” He pulled back and stared down at where we were joined, watching himself slide in and out. “I’m going to come so hard you’ll *feel* it.” And then his thrusts became harder, faster.

With his hand on my throat, he squeezed, pounding into me. His immense body tensed as he came, finding his release.

His orgasm seemed to go on for so long as he threw his head back slightly, his neck muscles standing on end. But he kept his focus on me as if he couldn’t stand to look away.

My pussy still had aftershocks from my climax, and the clenching and relaxing around his cock had him gritting his teeth.

Only when Dmitry had fully emptied himself into me did he place his hands on either side of my hips, his head hanging low, his eyes closed as his chest pumped up and down.

I was sweaty, sore, and now sticky between my legs, but so thoroughly pleasured I couldn’t help but smile. I ran my hands up and down his chiseled chest, his skin just as damp with perspiration as mine.

With a gruff sound, he pulled out, and I immediately felt his cum slipping from me. I shifted as I watched him stare at what came out of me.

“Hold still, *detka*. I need to see that cream pie.” Dmitry pushed his seed back in and hummed, then lined his cock back at my entrance and slid inside nice and slow, filling me back up.

I gasped at how sensitive I still was.

I let my eyes close, only to feel him grip my legs and push them to my chest. He leaned forward, the position causing my lower half to rise slightly off the bed.

For long minutes we stayed like that, kissing slowly and thoroughly, with my legs to my chest and Dmitry’s cock still semihard in my body.

Only when he seemed satisfied and fully sated did he pull out. He immediately rolled me to my side. With my back to his chest, he lifted my leg and draped it over his waist. And then he slid back into me.

Rock-hard all over again.

“Sleep, *printsessa*. I’ve only just started fucking you tonight.”

I was about to tell him I couldn’t sleep with his hard cock deep inside me, but when he started running his fingers through my hair, I found sleep came instantly.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 40

CLAUDIA

For most of the following week, we stayed in the suite doing nothing but fucking.

One of Dmitry's men had brought over Sasha, and I sat back and watched her show her love to Dmitry with face licks, pawing at his chest, and high-pitched yips.

Then she'd graced me with the same.

We took her up to the rooftop pool, lounged on the deck as she jumped in and swam around, and just talked and got to know each other.

Although I knew Dmitry held back plenty to protect me, I was thankful and pleased with whatever he told me. They were little morsels of the bigger puzzle that made up my husband.

He hated chocolate and peanut butter, lived off black coffee with a spoonful of sugar, and couldn't sleep more than three hours a night.

I asked him what he'd been doing this entire week while I slept, and he couldn't. He'd told me he watched me sleep, marveling at how lucky he was because he knew he didn't deserve me.

I wasn't the swooning type of girl, but with him I went full-on girl mode hearing that.

I didn't think anyone had ever been as sore as me when Dmitry got done working me over.

I also was pretty sure we'd come up with some brand-new sexual positions not known to man or thought possible to do with the human body.

In other words, Dmitry fucked me a lot.

One of the Bratva men had been coming by daily to take Sasha from the suite for her walks. She'd been staying with us the past week at the hotel. I

was glad Dmitry missed her just as much as I did, and had her stay with us instead of waiting until we went back to his penthouse.

In the kitchen, living room, and in the shower. On the couches and counters. Outside on the balcony where everyone could see us, and especially in the bedroom.

But my favorite, which I was realizing was Dmitry's too, was waking up to him between my legs as he ate me out.

Like he was doing right now.

I moaned and spread my thighs wider, tunneling my hand into his hair and pulling at the short, dark strands.

A look down my body showed the sheet pooled right under my breasts, completely covering Dmitry as he gripped me under my thighs, right beneath my ass, and titled my hips up to his mouth.

I moaned loudly and let my head fall back on the pillow as I closed my eyes. I felt him reach up and cup one of my breasts, pulling on my nipple and making the peak harder.

His hands were just so big that I once again felt so small compared to him. I hadn't realized the size difference would be such an aphrodisiac to me.

He shifted under the sheet and it fell down, revealing my upper body. I gazed at his hand, curled around my breast, and bit my lip. Each knuckle was tattooed with a suit from playing cards. And inked on the back of his hand was a detailed skull burning in flames with his mouth open and the fire eating it away.

God, I loved how many tattoos he had.

He lifted his head, and the sheet fell away, fully revealing his heated blue gaze to me. With my legs spread wide and his big body wedged between them, he looked like a king feasting.

Dmitry groaned and started eating me out again, sucking on my clit, and then probing my pussy hole.

The dual sensations of his hands on my breasts and his mouth on my pussy drove me higher to that plateau.

"You know I like your eyes on me." His words vibrated against my soft flesh, and I pried my eyes open to watch him. To obey him.

He leaned back slightly and, with a wicked grin, spit on my pussy before dragging his tongue up the slit.

"I'm so close." The truth was a moan from my lips.

I needed him to keep going, but as if my words were a deterrent, he slowed down his ministrations, pulling me away from that precipice.

I groaned in frustration and he chuckled deeply.

“Just stay on the edge, sweetheart. I promise it makes it feel so much better.” He went back to his slow and thorough licking and sucking. He brought me to the edge before pulling back.

Long minutes passed and I could do nothing but lay there and pant, perspiration covering my body, pleads spilling from my lips.

I could hear a ringing in the background, but I was too lost in the sensations to pay attention to it. It was on the third ring that Dmitry rose slightly and our gazes locked.

“Get it.”

I felt my eyes widen. “What? Now?” I all but shrieked, looking down the length of my body and telling him without words to get back to it.

He smirked and flattened his tongue at my pussy hole and dragged it up to the bundle of nerves at the top of my mound.

“Answer the phone, sweet thing.”

His demand shouldn’t have had my pussy throbbing in need.

I stared into his face for a long second, realizing he was being dead serious. I had no idea what his plans were, but I fumbled over to the bedside table and grabbed my cell phone.

Gio’s number flashed across the screen, and I shook my head, opening my mouth, about to tell Dmitry I wasn’t going to talk to my brother when he was between my thighs, eating me out.

But the words stalled on my lips when Dmitry brought his hand down and spanked my pussy. I cried out and arched my back. The sting caused a flare of pain to rise. He ran his fingers over my pussy, his touch gentle as he eased the discomfort.

And then soon that pain gave way to pleasure.

“*Otvet na zvonok*.” His voice was firm and demanding. There was no room for argument.

I didn’t need a translator to know what he said.

Answer the phone.

I answered the call, my eyes widening as I watched Dmitry go back to work licking me. I stared up at the ceiling and gritted my jaw, trying to push down the rising pleasure that was taking hold of me with every passing second.

“Hello?” I cleared my throat and shifted on the bed. Dmitry placed his hand flat on my belly, adding pressure to keep me still.

“*Sorellina*,” Gio said in his deep voice, but then a second later he started speaking to somebody else, his voice getting tighter, harsher as he spit out Italian. After a second he started speaking to me again. “I’m sorry about that.”

“It’s okay.” I heard the breathlessness in my voice and cleared my throat, but a squeak came from me when Dmitry thrust his tongue into my pussy.

He growled low, and my eyes rolled back in my head from the vibrations.

Oh God. How was I going to keep calm for this call while I was speaking on the phone with Gio? This was so messed up in so many ways.

“Listen, I’ve been in Desolation for the past week for business. I head back home in two days. I’d love to get together and see you before that. You, Amara and Luca. Leave the men at home.”

He snapped out those last few words, and if I wasn’t in the throes of ecstasy with my husband, I probably would’ve chuckled.

“Okay.” There was a tense moment of silence, and my heart started racing a little harder, worrying my brother knew how disgustingly lewd I was being right now.

“Is everything all right?” There was concern in Gio’s voice, and I cleared my throat again, trying to push Dmitry away with my hand on his head.

He growled again and bit the inside of my thigh before dragging his tongue over it and soothing the sting.

“I’m fine. Everything’s fine.”

I felt my orgasm rise and shook my head, trying to get away from Dmitry’s talented mouth.

“*Ne shumi, kogda zakonchish*.” *Don’t make a sound when you finish.* He grinned and sucked on my clit.

I felt the climax steal me away and slammed the cell on my chest facedown, biting my lip to hold off my moan. I tasted copper on my tongue as I broke the skin.

I could hear Gio’s deep voice muffled, rising as his worry was clear.

I exhaled and with a shaky hand, lifted the cell to my ear as I glared at Dmitry.

“Sorry,” I said and cleared my throat. “I dropped the phone.” There was a pause of silence, and I quickly added, “Let’s plan lunch before you go.”

“I’ll call tomorrow after I look through my schedule and we’ll plan something.”

“Yeah. Yeah, okay.” My pulse started rising when Dmitry rose, his huge cock jutting forward. “I have to go, though. I—I’ll call you tomorrow.”

I disconnected the call and tossed the phone across the room, narrowing my eyes at my husband, who looked up at me and grinned, a devilish glint in his eyes.

“That was so wrong.”

He smoothed his hands along my inner thighs, framing my pussy as he just stared at it. I would’ve felt self-conscious at the attention he gave my pussy, but his heated look and the way he hummed low in approval set my blood on fire.

“I’m all about doing the bad things, baby girl.”

He gave my pussy several long licks, bringing me to the precipice of coming before he eased up and gripped the root of his cock, dragging his palm to the tip.

A string of clear fluid dripped from his cock slit to my cleft. It was so nasty in the best way.

I thought he’d shove right into me, ease the ache deep in me. But he surprised me by licking and kissing all my exposed skin instead.

He dragged his tongue over my shoulder, down my arm, biting me like a primal animal.

He growled, affirming he was more beast than man.

And then he moved behind me, adjusted me so I was on my side, and lifted my thigh to drape it over his waist, spreading me open.

Without preamble he notched the tip of his cock at my entrance and thrust into me, stilling… buried deep. This different angle had him hitting something delicious inside of me.

I popped my ass out more, needing him as deep as he could go.

“Are you on birth control?”

I arched my back, moaning, “No.” Although he hadn’t asked me this before, the things he’d said when he fucked me led me to believe he got off on a breeding kink.

And I didn’t know why I found that so hot, too.

He reared back and pushed inside of me again, his fingers digging into my waist painfully as he kept me right where he wanted.

He grunted out, “Good,” and I didn’t know why that had my pussy clenching so hard or had my breath ceasing.

Why was that so hot?

“I like the fact that you could get pregnant. I fucking want you to be so filled by me there isn’t a place on this sweet little body that I haven’t touched intimately.”

My ass shook as he thrust into me. Pressed to his groin, the rough scrape of the short dark hair I knew he had on his lower abdomen heightened the eroticism of what we did.

He fucked me, hard and vicious. The sounds coming from him were a mixture of grunts, groans, and snarls.

“I’m going to keep fucking you until I knock you up.” He latched his teeth onto my shoulder and growled. “I hope you’re already pregnant from the times I filled your sweet pussy up with my cum.”

I had a hand on his, which gripped my hip like a vise.

“*Jesus Christ*,” he breathed against my flesh. “You hear how wet you are? How juicy this cunt sounds as I fuck it?”

My breasts jiggled from the force of his fucking.

“I think you like the idea of me getting you pregnant.” My inner walls clenched around him and he groaned. “Such a good girl. So fucking perfect, Claudia.”

He started really fucking me then, brutal pounding that had my pussy aching in the best possible way.

“Makes me so fucking hard knowing I’m working on filling you up to put my baby in you.” *Thrust. Thrust. Thrust.* “I didn’t need to be married to you to make that happen, but can’t lie…” *Thrust. Thrust.* “Makes my cock throb knowing you’re mine in all ways.” *Thrust*. “Just picturing your belly nice and round and walking around so everyone can see what I did to you has me nearly coming right now, little bird.”

His pumping hips started getting more wild, more disorganized, as if he couldn’t keep the pace straight, as if he was too turned on.

“I’m gonna blow inside of you, so much that when I pull out, all you’ll feel is my cum slipping out that tight little pussy.”

And when he bit my shoulder again, growling like a maniac, I felt my inner muscles clench, my orgasm imminent.

“*Ne konchat'. Yeshcho net. Ostavaytes' tam, na krayu. Day mne posmotret', kak ty izo vsekh sil pytayesh'sya ne konchit.*”

“Damn it, Dmitry. English,” I moaned.

“Mmm, I like when you have a smart mouth, you beautiful brat.” He dragged his tongue over my mouth. “Don’t finish. Not yet. Stay right there at the edge. Let me watch you struggle not to finish.”

My moans increased, and my entire body lit up.

“You wait until I tell you to come, Claudia. Be my good girl and don’t fucking get off until I give you permission.”

He grunted, and I tried not to focus on how hard he was, how big and thick his cock was as he stretched me.

“Oh God. *Please*. I can’t, Dmitry.” He gripped my chin and forced me to look at him. His expression was so fervent that I sucked in a shaky breath.

“Tell me who you love.” He rolled his hips, ground himself into me, and I closed my eyes and moaned. I thrust back onto his hard cock, needing to feel all of him up inside of me. “Tell me.”

“You,” I moaned and started lifting my hips, fucking myself against him. “I love you, Dmitry.”

He grunted and groaned. “*Poprosi menya konchit vnutr' tebya. Umolyay menya*.” His teeth were bared. “Ask me to come inside of you. Beg me to.”

My body clenched and relaxed around him, and as I stared into his eyes, I whispered what he wanted. What I wanted.

“Come in me.”

A low rumble of pleasure left him, and he gave me no mercy. He pulled out and pushed in, throwing his hips back and forth as he fucked me.

And when he placed his palm on my stomach, growling that he was going to put his baby in me, I felt my orgasm crash to the surface so suddenly I saw stars.

“*Takaya krasivaya*.” *So beautiful.*

I was still riding that high as I heard skin slapping against skin as Dmitry’s harsh Russian words filled my head.

I felt the bed shake as he slammed his hands down on either side of my head, pistoning his hips, forcing me to take every single huge inch of him.

Another orgasm filled me at the same time he groaned and came, his cock thickening, the hot jets of his cum filling me so I actually *felt* it.

We might have already had sex before getting married, but this moment… it felt different. It felt profound.

When he collapsed on top of me, bracing his body weight on his elbows so he didn't crush me, I felt the heavy weight of contentment and pleasure press down on me.

He stayed buried in me for long moments, doing nothing but making out with me until I felt my desire rise once more.

I would have asked him to keep going, but he pulled out and fell onto his back beside me a moment later, panting.

My body was sore. I was sticky between my thighs, my flesh burning in a way that one gets when male scruff scrapes along your inner thighs as he makes you come.

I shifted so I was facing Dmitry and ran my fingers over scars on his forearms, wanting to know their story but not sure if bringing it up, asking, would open those wounds he'd buried deep down.

He placed his hand over mine, stilling my wandering fingers over the marks.

I glanced up at him, my heart in my throat as we held each other's stares.

He broke eye contact first and rested fully against the bed, staring at the ceiling.

"My father used to beat me. He said it was to strengthen me." There was a shift in his tone, no hint of emotion. "My scars run deeper than what's on the surface, than what my ink can hide."

I moved closer and rested my cheek on his chest. He wrapped his arm around me, his other hand cupping the back of my head before he sifted his fingers through the strands.

"I tried to protect my siblings as much as possible, so I took the brunt of our father's abuse. After a while it was easy to go deep into myself so I didn't feel, hear, or experience anything."

My heart was slowly breaking, but I stayed silent as I listened and let him tell me his story the way he felt comfortable.

"And when the time came, I made sure Leonid Petrov died the only way he deserved. Slow and painfully."

He stroked his thumb over my bare arm, and goose bumps covered my skin.

“I welcomed and embraced the darkness and my demons. It made me who and what I was. It made others fear me because they knew I’d destroy anything that got in my way. I didn’t think I’d feel… anything but loyalty and love for my brother and sister. But then something changed.”

I tipped my head back and stared at his profile. My heart was racing as he turned to look at me.

“And that something was you, Claudia. I didn’t know my demons could be soothed.” He slid his hand to cup my cheek. “They like the sound of your voice and the sight of you. They calm at your sweet scent and the light that surrounds you.”

“Dmitry—”

“Shhh. I love you. You’re mine, and nothing else matters in this world to me.” He moved his hand to my belly, his palm flat as he encompassed the entire thing. “I will forever be faithful to you. I’ll make sure you never want for anything in life, not monetary or materialistic, and sure as fuck, not emotionally or physically.” He kept stroking my belly. “And I can’t wait until you’re filled with our first baby.” He dipped his head to steal a kiss. “My *malehnkaya ptichka*.”

He wrapped his arms around me, and I rested my head on his chest, hearing his heart beating steadily, and fell asleep to that sound.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 41

CLAUDIA

I hadn’t been able to get back to sleep after Dmitry told me about the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father. I knew he’d left out so much, but he’d opened up to me regardless, and I felt even closer to him.

I slipped out of bed, mindful not to wake him. I grabbed one of the plush hotel robes and wrapped it around my body, looking over at him.

He was lying on his stomach, one arm underneath his pillow, the sheet pooled low on his hips. His chest rose and fell gently as he slept deeply.

I took in the sight of his tattooed back, no spot of unblemished skin visible. I could see more scars hidden underneath that dark ink and my throat tightened. I thought back to a young Dmitry fighting for his life with his father, having to take the abuse to protect his siblings.

I felt my eyes water, wanting nothing more than to curl up next to him and wrap him in my arms. I wanted to protect my husband, even though he was three times my size and could crush a man with his bare hands.

I forced myself to leave the bedroom and walk out to the small kitchenette to get a glass of water and down it. After setting the glass in the sink, I leaned against the counter and stared across the living room area of the suite and out the floor-to-ceiling windows.

The city was still plunged in darkness, but with so many lights twinkling, every dark and dangerous space was illuminated.

I glanced at the double doors that led into the bedroom, my throat tight as I couldn’t stop thinking about how hard and painful that must’ve been. I wanted to kill his father all over again to exact vengeance for the man I was in love with.

I walked over to the windows and stared outside. There was a massive silver and onyx building across the street, lights dotting the windows, whereas others were as black as the night. I wrapped my arms around my body, suddenly so cold.

I reached down and grabbed his jacket that was slung over the back of the chair beside me, and wrapped myself up in it. I rested my forehead on the glass and closed my eyes, inhaling deeply.

His scent was everywhere.

I wanted to bottle it up and use it as perfume, to have it with me everywhere. I couldn't describe how it made me feel, how it aroused me and made me have this sense of safety all in the same breath.

I didn't know how long I stood there, but it was when fatigue set in that I went to slip the jacket off and go back to bed with my husband.

I set his jacket over the back of the chair and a rolled-up stack of paperwork fell out, landing beside my feet.

A part of me knew I should've put the papers back into his jacket pocket, but curiosity had me opening them up. It looked like a contract of sorts. I wasn't an expert on the legalities. But as I skimmed the paper, I got the gist of what this was, even if all the legal jargon blurred together.

It was some kind of contract for fighting. It would've been humorous, given the fact I knew their underground fighting circuit wasn't exactly legal.

I was confused why they would need any kind of legal paperwork when the fighting circuit wasn't even legal. But maybe this wasn't something that they planned on upholding in court. Maybe it was something that went far deeper than what the judicial system could uphold? I knew enough through my father's dealings that contracts within the mob weren't unusual.

But the stipulations usually meant death, assets given over to another family house, or arranged marriages to strengthen ties and bonds and form alliances.

I was about to fold the papers back up when I got to the bottom and everything in me stilled. The fighter who signed the contract scrawled his name on the bottom.

D'yavol.

But it wasn't the fighter's ominous Russian name that had me freezing. I knew that signature, that penmanship I'd seen many times throughout my

life. I stared at the signature, at the “A” that had the same swooping curve as I did.

My heart raced; my stomach turned.

My brother.

My hands shook as I reread the paperwork. Gio was fighting for the Bratva? He was working for—maybe with—Dmitry? I didn’t understand any of this. It wasn’t like he needed the money. Our family had wealth. Gio had notoriety and loyalty from those around him.

The only thing that made sense was Gio doing this as an outlet for his rage, for all that male aggression and dark need that he kept bottled up.

I looked toward the door to the bedroom, my heart in my throat, my hand suddenly feeling clammy. I felt a wave of sudden betrayal from Dmitry and Gio.

I wish Gio would have felt honest with me, but I knew Gio was violent and reveled in bloodshed.

I felt that sting of betrayal with Dmitry because I felt like we had been close these past five years even if it was been one sided, even if I knew why he wouldn’t have said anything before we were married.

I tried to sift through my brain on any little detail that I might’ve missed over the years that would’ve told me what was actually going on. I thought about the lunch we’d just had, where Nikolai had wanted us to go to a fight.

Now that I was really thinking about my brother-in-law's expression, how he’d smirked and glanced at Gio… He’d wanted me to know. He wanted to out Gio.

I kept going further back, dissecting the past.

I remembered when Dmitry had gotten arrested all those years ago, when the underground fight had been raided. I’d been only fifteen, had been staying with Amara and Nikolai, and tried to call Gio to tell him I was staying. But he hadn’t answered the call. Had he been there at the fight? Obviously he hadn’t gotten arrested, but even then I found it strange he hadn’t answered.

I folded the paperwork back and put it in Dmitry’s pocket, then just stood there for a moment, feeling dizzy and nauseous.

I walked back toward the bedroom and stood beside the bed, staring at Dmitry. I ran my hands up and down my thighs, wiping away the dampness from my palms. There was no way I was going to sleep.

Dmitry stirred and opened his eyes, still laying on his stomach as he stared at me.

"*Krasavitsa*," he murmured sleepily and held out his hand.

I took his hand and let him pull me onto the bed. He covered me with the sheet and then pressed my back to his chest. He threw a leg over me, his arm a band around my abdomen, his face buried in my nape as he inhaled deeply and groaned in pleasure.

I felt him relax further as he went back to sleep, but all I could do was keep thinking about when I planned on confronting my husband about my brother being the devil.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 42

CLAUDIA

Dmitry had gotten a call from Nikolai early this morning saying there was a pop-up underground fight happening, and that we should go tonight. He said Amara was coming, as was Tatiana, whom he'd growled had invited herself.

I eavesdropped, trying to act like I wasn't, but ever since finding that paperwork and realizing what Gio had been up to, now more than ever, I was curious.

I'd been able to hear Nikolai's deep voice through the receiver when Dmitry had stood beside me, touching me, as if he hadn't been able to stop himself. But then they switched to Russian, which thwarted my plans to be nosy.

I knew he probably would have told me something if I'd just asked, but it wouldn't have been the full truth. And honestly I didn't want to know about everything he did.

I'd dealt with enough violence in my life when I lived with my father, but I didn't need to know about my husband's affiliations and dealings, too.

I still expected honesty—to an extent—and respect, and that meant Dmitry telling me what was going on when it concerned my family.

We sat in Dmitry's Drako GTE, the music on low enough that it was more like white noise than entertainment.

He downshifted and the car sped up. I glanced at him, nibbling my bottom lip as my nerves rose.

Would I see Gio tonight in the ring as *D'yavol*?

"What's on your mind, my sweet girl?"

Dmitry glanced at me, and I felt my cheeks heat at how observant he was.

“Nothing,” I lied. “Just thinking about tonight and seeing an underground fight for the first time.” The partial truth.

He was silent for a moment, then said, “I hate to break it to you, *detka*, but you’re a terrible liar.”

He placed his hand on my thigh, rubbing his thumb back and forth over the bare skin that was exposed from my skirt rising.

I couldn’t help but smile at the memory of when I’d come out of the bathroom, wearing the faux leather skirt that fell to midthigh, my white bodysuit skintight and not hiding that I was braless.

When he’d growled low that he could see my nipples, I scoffed and placed my hands on my hips, informing him you couldn’t wear a bra with this outfit because it would show lines.

But to placate him, I’d thrown on a black crop jacket to cover my chest.

He’d shook his head, pointing to the bathroom and telling me to change. I’d tried the route of telling him this wasn’t how the marriage was going to work.

When that didn’t deter him, I went to wound his male pride and agreed to go change since it was clear he didn’t think he could protect me.

He narrowed his eyes, gritted his teeth, and finally exhaled, running a hand over his jaw, and relented.

I smiled. He shook his head again and muttered under his breath that he was going to end up having to kill somebody tonight because they were checking me out.

I smiled at the memory and placed my hand on top of his as he kept stroking my thigh. With my palm over his, I wasn’t trying to push him away.

I wanted to keep Dmitry exactly where he was, that heavy weight warm and so comforting that it washed away my anxiousness that was like a cement block inside of me.

We sat in silence, but my body was slowly heating the more he stroked his thumb back and forth over my thigh. He slid his hand up, pushing my skirt with it.

I shifted, squirmed on the leather seat. My breathing increased, and I glanced at Dmitry to see him looking calm and collected.

He had one hand on the steering wheel, the light from the dashboard illuminating his profile. God, he looked so damn good. I'd never seen a man more attractive than my husband.

Tonight he wore a pair of dark slacks that showed off his tree trunk–sized thighs and muscular physique. The sleeves of his dark gray button-down shirt were rolled up his defined, tattooed forearms.

I stared at the ring finger of his left hand, one that now had a plain platinum band encircling it.

When one of the young Russian boys came by early in the morning for Sasha, and Dmitry had been in the shower, I'd put my plan in motion. I'd asked the man for a favor before handing over my bank card.

But he'd shook his head, declining my card. I'd felt dejected for a second, but when he told me it would be his honor to get his Pakhan's wife what she needed, I stood there with my mouth open.

And then he was gone, returning two hours later with what I'd asked for. I'd been holding a black leather box in hand, my husband's new wedding band inside, and not able to help but smile.

I'd seen the ring at one store when Dmitry had taken me shopping after we'd gotten married.

I got a glimpse of what Dmitry felt when he talked about marking me… owning me when he was deep in my body. Because seeing him wearing that wedding band… yeah. It did things to me.

I bit my lip again, nibbling on the flesh as he crept his hand higher until he was smoothing a finger up and down my center, right over my panties.

"So wet for me, baby girl."

I rested my head back on the seat and closed my eyes, a soft moan leaving me when he added pressure to my clit.

My inner muscles clenched painfully, and I felt more wetness spill from my body to prepare for something only Dmitry could give me.

"Let's see how fast I can make my wife come." He took the highway, accelerating his speed at the same time he teased the edge of my panties and pulled the material aside.

And then he was touching my bare pussy, slipping his fingers through my soaked cleft before teasing my entrance and dipping a finger inside.

I clenched around the digit, and he groaned, shifting on his seat and increasing the car's speed even more.

Oh God. Why was this all so hot?

With his skilled fingers, he kept a finger lodged in my pussy, twisted his wrist slightly so he could rub my clit with his thumb, and started working me over.

I spread my legs, giving him better access, and felt that familiar peak rise like a wave rushing to the shore.

“Is my girl close to giving Daddy what he wants?”

I couldn’t answer, so I moaned instead, my pussy clenching harder on his finger. I needed something more substantial. I needed his big cock.

With my hand gripping the handle of the door and the other curled around the edge of the passenger-side seat, I let the pleasure crash through me.

I groaned loud and long as Dmitry got me off, racing down the highway at a breakneck speed so I felt like I was flying high.

I slumped back on the seat and exhaled. Dmitry gave my clit one last rub, pulled his hand out from between my thighs, fixed my soaked panties, and turned off on our exit.

I looked at him then, watching as he brought his hand to his mouth and sucked on the finger he’d just been fucking me with.

“Never tasted anything sweeter than my little wife’s perfect cunt.”

I clamped my thighs shut and moaned again. God, this man had a way with his filthy words.

Before long we were going down a shady-looking neighborhood, the houses looking like they hadn’t been lived in for decades. I saw the occasional vagrant shuffling around.

The neighborhood opened up to a more industrial area, and then he was turning off a side road and into a massive graveled lot.

There was a dirty-looking bay beside the high warehouse. I could see faded writing above large bay doors, but it was too washed out to discern the name.

Dmitry drove the car around the back, cut the engine, and was out of the vehicle and opening the passenger-side door before I could even take anything in.

He wrapped his arm around my waist, keeping me snug to his side as he led us toward a steel door at the back of the warehouse.

It opened before we even got to it, and a beast of a man with hardly any neck stepped to the side. He averted his eyes when Dmitry approached,

murmured something in Russian, which Dmitry grunted in response, and in we went.

The scent of damp earth, mold, grime and dirt, and the distinct tang of something metallic filled my nose as we went deeper inside.

I shivered, not able to hide the fact this place was creepy as hell.

“Don’t worry, *krasavitsa*. The one thing these fuckers are afraid of here is me.”

I didn’t have time to respond, because we’d stopped in front of another door, which opened on a squeak of rusted metal.

There was a staircase that descended, and although I didn’t see the person who’d opened the door, I felt him watching.

I was glad I’d gone for thigh-high flat boots tonight instead of heels, because the rickety slats of the stairs would have surely had me breaking my neck.

The deeper we descended, the louder the noise became until we got to the bottom and turned the corner to see a massive underground fighting circuit.

The room was enormous, with rusty red metal beams overhead, caged lights hanging from the ceiling, and a ring erected in the center of the sprawling space.

Men came up to Dmitry to speak with him, their voices loud enough over the rushing noise that I could hear their Russian. Dmitry would respond with a few clipped words and brush past them as if they were annoying gnats.

People parted for us like oil from water, and I didn’t miss the way the men glanced to the ground, not daring to look at Dmitry, whereas a lot of the women openly showed their desire for my husband.

I bristled at that and heard Dmitry chuckle. When I glanced at him, I noticed he watched me, a smirk on his face. Well shit. He’d likely seen the jealousy I felt splattered across my face and in my body language.

The observant, gorgeous bastard.

He leaned in, his lips brushing the shell of my ear. “I like seeing my beautiful wife jealous. Makes me feel better that you’re as deep into this as I am.”

He had no idea.

He dragged his tongue along the spot right below my ear. “And just to let you know, I’ve wanted to kill a handful of motherfuckers already

because they were looking in your direction.”

He kissed my racing jugular and then straightened, his fingers tightening around my waist as we kept walking.

There was a row of chairs right in front of the ring. I saw Nikolai sitting in one at the end, Amara right beside him. He had his arm slung over her shoulder and said something in her ear. Something that had her cheeks turning red.

Tatiana sat beside Amara, and I noticed she seemed antsy as hell.

Dmitry led me to the seat beside his sister. I sat down and he took the one beside me. Both Petrov brothers caged in the women in their lives to keep them safe.

I saw a few men dressed in dark fatigues close to where we were seated and noticed how they nodded to Nikolai and Dmitry. I knew they worked for my husband and brother-in-law and were dispatched to watch over us as well.

I would have scoffed at the overprotectiveness, but this place was utter pandemonium, and I felt a hell of a lot better knowing I had Dmitry at my side.

We didn’t have to wait more than a few minutes before everyone in the room went absolutely wild. My ears rang from the earsplitting screams.

I didn’t have to wait long to see what everybody was so excited about. A moment later, a massive man jumped into the ring.

He had a shock of dark red buzzed hair and eyes so green I could even make out the vibrant color from this distance. He had a frightening dragon tattoo that covered one shoulder, the hind legs and wings slithering down his arm.

I could see a nasty scar that sliced across his forehead and down one cheek. He also had a sour as hell expression on his face, as if he were waiting for his opponent so the bloodshed could begin.

I felt a strange anticipation as adrenaline rushed through my body, exploding to fill every space in me. Everybody quieted down for a moment, and then there was an uproar of absolute chaos.

People stood up and shouted, raising their hands in the air as they screamed vile, aggressive things.

I looked at Amara, who winced and covered her rounded belly. The noise was obviously too much. Nikolai pushed the long fall of her hair off her shoulder and said something to her. She shook her head, and after a

narrow-eyed look, he handed her a pair of earplugs, which she took and put in with a grateful smile.

Dmitry had offered me a pair before we left the car, but I'd declined. Right now I was kicking myself for not taking them.

Nikolai wrapped his arm tightly around Amara's shoulder and pulled her closer. He placed his free hand over hers, which rested protectively on her rounded belly. I looked at Dmitry to see him watching me. He wore a concerned expression on his face.

He leaned in close and murmured against my ear, "*Detka*, how about we go back to the hotel room? I'll lick every inch of you until you're begging me to fuck you, and then I'll fill you up nice and good and make you come three times."

I shivered at how those words did wicked things to me. He pulled back, his nose nearly touching mine. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him I wanted exactly that, but I pushed my arousal down and shook my head.

"I want to stay here. I want to watch the fight." I wanted the confirmation that *D'yavol* was actually my brother.

To my left, I saw people moving out of the way. Even from this distance, I could see the man they were parting for. He was a head taller than everyone else. He was as tall and broad as Nikolai and Dmitry.

And when he effortlessly hopped onto the stage, I knew without a doubt I was staring at my brother.

He'd kept his identity ambiguous, what with the skull mask covering the lower half of his face. He wore black boxing shorts, tape wrapped around his knuckles, and nothing else.

Everyone was shouting, "*D'yavol!*" repeatedly, and it was clear he was the fan favorite.

In any other instance Gio's tattoos could have been identifiable, but Gio had always been so careful about showing them off. In fact, thinking back through my childhood, I didn't remember a time when he'd ever shown them off. The most I'd ever seen were his forearms and the sides of his neck.

And now I realized he'd done all of that on purpose. If he couldn't be identified by his tattoos, and his face was covered… no one would know who he was.

I felt Amara looking at me, and I glanced her way. Her eyes were wide, her gaze bouncing between me and the skull-masked man in the center. I

knew what she was saying without uttering a word.

That's Gio.

I nodded slowly and stared at my brother.

Gio wasn't looking at us, but I knew he was fully aware we were sitting front and center. He'd been at lunch when Nikolai talked about us going. But even if he hadn't been, Gio—like a lot of men in the underworld circuit—had this sixth sense about… everything.

And because he hadn't stopped us from coming here tonight, a part of me wanted to believe he wanted us to know, to find out this way.

I felt Dmitry's hand slip along my back, and I turned my attention to him. Now it was my turn to feel like my eyes were wide with shock.

He leaned in close and whispered in my ear, "My beautiful wife." When he pulled back, there were a lot of questions in that one endearment.

And I blurted out everything from the previous night. "I wasn't snooping," I started off. "But I found paperwork." My heart jumped into my throat when I saw that Gio was looking between me and Amara.

Although I couldn't see much of an expression because of his mask, I wondered what he was thinking right now, wondered if he felt just as shocked as we did, even if he knew we were going to be here.

I felt Dmitry's fingers on my cheek as he guided my head back so I could look at him. "I realized *D'yavol* was Gio. Figured it out from his signature." I swallowed the sudden lump in my throat. "We write the letter *A* the same," I whispered, knowing Dmitry couldn't hear me over the rush of noise.

He smoothed his thumb back and forth over my cheek, his brows lowered. I could see the turmoil on his face. Although the room was definitely loud, I felt like we were in our own little world.

"Before marrying you, it wasn't my place to tell you what your brother did in his free time." His voice was even, carrying to me in a small space so everything was crystal clear.

"And after marrying me?" I hedged.

He glanced at Gio, who stood in the ring's corner bouncing on the balls of his feet, rolling his shoulders, and doing circles with his arms to warm up.

When Dmitry glanced back at me, he exhaled roughly. "I would've told you everything. I planned on doing it. This wasn't how I wanted you to find out, even though I knew you would eventually."

“But why? Why would he need to do any of this?” Of course I knew the answers even though I’d asked the questions.

My husband leaned back and took on a relaxed disposition, moving his hand to rest on the back of my neck and sliding his fingers over my skin.

“Some people need an outlet, sweet girl. Some people need to feel like they are nobody and everybody all in the same breath.” He kept stroking the back of my neck. “Fighting in the underground is violent and ugly, and your brother doesn’t want you to see his demons come out.”

As I looked into my husband’s face, I could see he felt the same way about himself. These men had evil and darkness in them, and for Gio, this was how he dealt with it all.

My husband and my brother wanted to protect me, not only from the threats of the outside world, but from themselves as well.

After that, I kept my mouth shut and watched the fight, marveling at how vicious and strategic Gio was with his moves. It was like watching ballet, each step, kick, and punch looking almost choreographed. It was hard not to note the beauty in it.

The fight seemed to go on forever, but it was also done in the blink of an eye.

And then, with one brutal punch, Gio slammed his knuckles into the other fighter’s head. He went down like a bag of bricks. For a moment I thought Gio had killed the other man, but I could see the slight twitching of his fingers, and the irregular rise and fall of his chest.

A few men came into the ring and pulled the redhead out, having to drag his nearly lifeless body off. Blood smeared along the already stained white mat.

The crowd went insanely wild, and I couldn't look away from Gio. He stood in the center of the ring, his chest covered with a mixture of sweat and blood. He looked in our direction, his head slightly lowered, his gaze flickering between Amara, me, and finally landing on Tatiana, where it lingered. Interesting.

I noticed that nobody came up to congratulate Gio. I didn’t know if that was how these types of illegal fights went, or if they just knew to stay away from him because he was dangerous.

With one hard, lingering look between the three of us, my brother jumped out of the cage and disappeared into the crowd.

I stood, and Dmitry and the others did as well. Dmitry placed a hand on the small of my back, and as a unit, we made our way through the path of chaotic bodies that had been made for us.

Tonight I was going to figure out what the hell was going on.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 43

CLAUDIA

We found ourselves in a crudely erected locker room. It seemed a bit out of place for the debilitated warehouse.

But it was clear it had been made for the fighters to have some place to keep their stuff, get cleaned off, and have their wounds patched up, seeing as there was a med area off to the side.

I could see down the short hall an open doorway that led to a shower room. Surrounding me there were several rows of lockers, towels stacked on benches, and some duffel bags sitting on the ground.

For this being all back-alley shit, I was surprised at how professional this area appeared.

The door shut behind us with a resounding *click*. It seemed almost final. As if we were trapped in a cage with a starving tiger.

And that feline was my brother, whose shoulders were tensed, hands clenched tightly, and who paced back and forth.

He stopped moving when we entered, turning to face us. His gaze bounced between Dmitry and Nikolai, and this low sound of warning left him.

He ripped off the skull mask and gripped the material fiercely in his hand.

“You,” he said and pointed to Nikolai. “And fucking you,” Gio hissed under his breath and stabbed his finger toward Dmitry. “Both of you bastards brought my sisters here. What the fuck is wrong with you assholes?”

Dmitry was tense behind me, his hand still wrapped around my waist as he kept my back to his chest. Nikolai chuckled deeply, placing himself in front of Amara, as if he actually thought Gio would hurt her.

“And bringing your little sister here?” Gio snarled as he looked at Tatiana.

She darted her gaze to the floor, twisting her fingers in front of her.

“Bunch of motherfuckers. The both of you Russian assholes.”

“I would’ve found out eventually,” I finally said when the tension got to be too much, and I knew Gio was seconds away from really snapping.

All eyes were trained on me now.

“I found paperwork last night with your signature on it. *D'yavol*. I recognized your penmanship. I figured it out that way.”

Gio’s nostrils flared and I could see his face become red. With a disgruntled sound, he turned from us, running a hand over his short black hair.

“Your husband just had to cross that line—”

“—Watch it, motherfucker,” Dmitry was the one to snarl now.

Everyone stayed silent as if they were waiting for one of these three men to lose their shit.

“I made a deal with Dmitry and Nikolai to do the underground circuit. They keep the winnings, and in return they let me fight as often as I want and they keep their mouths shut.”

I looked at Dmitry, who was watching me instead of Gio.

“If the *Cosa Nostra* found out what I was doing behind their backs, making deals with the Bratva without speaking to the heads of Italy first, chaos would have happened.”

And, of course, Nikolai had to open his mouth. “Get a fucking grip, man.”

Amara hissed something unintelligible at him, which had him snorting like he found this shit funny. But he kept his mouth shut. For the time being.

Or so I thought.

“Your brother is over here throwing a hissy fit. From where I’m standing, watching a six-foot-five, three-hundred-pound man acting all pissed that his little sisters found out he is doing illegal fights is hilarious to me.”

“Jesus Christ, *brat*,” Dmitry muttered in annoyance. “Shut the hell up.” Nikolai cast him a narrow-eyed glance.

Gio rounded on Nikolai quickly. I stumbled back and pressed against Dmitry’s chest. He wrapped his arms around me, but after a second he shifted me around so he now stood in front, acting as a human wall.

Nikolai pushed Amara back gently, barking out something in Russian to Tatiana. The other woman reached for Amara, then the two of them moved to the other side of the wall and away from what was slowly rising into dangerous territory.

Gio faced off with Nikolai, his nostrils flaring, the aggression pouring off him tangible enough I actually felt it.

I could see Nikolai grin before he moved his head back and forth on his neck, rolled his shoulders, and took off his suit jacket.

And then, faster than I could expect, Gio clocked Nikolai in the side of the mouth. The Russian’s head whipped to the side, and I could see his lip split and blood oozing out of the fresh wound.

Amara gasped, Tatiana hissed out something unintelligible to Nikolai, and I took a step forward. Dmitry curled his hand around my wrist, stopping me from advancing farther.

I heard a gun cock and snapped my head to Dmitry, seeing my husband holding a gun to Gio.

“No,” I shouted, but Nikolai murmured something in Russian to Dmitry and held his hand out, stopping his brother from coming closer.

“That’s your free shot, Gio.” Nikolai ran his thumb over his mouth, smearing the blood before bringing the digit to his mouth and licking it off.

Both men stared at each other, Gio’s chest pumping up and down, his teeth bared, and murder in his eyes. Nikolai stood there like he was bored as hell.

Finally—thank God—Gio exhaled and scrubbed a hand over his face. It was clear he tried to regain his control, and as the seconds passed, his aggression faded.

“I wasn’t purposely trying to keep this from either of you,” Gio finally spoke, addressing me and Amara. “But I’d be lying if I didn't admit that if I could have, I would have.”

I nodded, not knowing what to say for a moment, before finally gathering my thoughts. “I wish you had told us. I wanted to be there for you.”

“We both would’ve been there for you.” Amara spoke then and took a step closer, brushing away Nikolai’s arm when he tried to stop her.

Gio cleared his throat and nodded, but he wouldn’t look at us. “Growing up”—he paused, then cleared his throat again—“Father was…”

His brows pulled low, and I could see he was sifting through the memories of his childhood. I’d seen our father beat Gio, degrade and demean him. It had all been in the guise of “toughening him up for the *Cosa Nostra* life.”

And no matter how strong my brother was, how invincible I'd always seen him as, that abuse had obviously left massive scars not only on the outside but also the inside. God, it was heartbreaking that the men in our world, in these corrupt organizations, had been bred and shaped to be the way they were. It was such a vicious cycle.

“The things Father made me do, the situations I witnessed, it’s forever a part of me.” His shoulders bunched. “I did a lot of fucked-up shit.” I felt the tension in the room increase. But thankfully Nikolai and Dmitry kept their mouths shut. “And I’m forever fucked up because of it.” He looked at us again.

I would have hoped to see some kind of break in his emotions after baring his soul the way he had, but our brother was like a brick wall. Steel on one side, barbed wire on the other.

“I fucking like it. You understand, sisters?”

My breath caught, and I nodded, understanding.

“And fighting… it helps me unleash all that hate I have inside of me. It’ll never go away. So I fucking embrace it.” He held his hands out, palms up, as he stared at them. “These hands have killed many people. They’ve been covered in blood, helped bury bodies, and tortured people.”

Nausea rose in me. I didn’t want to hear these things, but in the same breath I did, because I could see he wanted us to know. It was a weight that was finally being lifted from him.

“Fighting has been my dark, messed up therapy for a long time. But I feel relief that both of you know what I do.” He ran a hand over his sweaty, bloody face. “And I won’t lie and say I didn’t fight in Desolation because I wanted to be closer to my sisters. With both of you so far away, it was fucking hard on me.”

All the men in this room had the same evil and demons in them. And all they needed was the love of a woman to help ease their suffering. I wanted

that for my brother, and would pray to whatever higher power would listen that he'd be given that.

And then, before I knew what I was doing, I was walking toward Gio and throwing my arms around his waist. I rested my forehead on the center of his chest and murmured how much I loved him.

"You're so strong. You've always been so strong for us because you were the best big brother anyone could ask for." I was crying, my throat tight as all this emotion rose in me. "You were a good son, and I'm sorry Father and Mother never saw that. I'm sorry they hurt you." I tightened my arms around him. "I'll never leave your side."

Amara came over too, and I made room for our sister to wrap her arms around him. "I love you, *fratellone*. We're family and we love you. You're not alone."

It didn't matter what he did or who he was. We'd always be family. We'd always have each other.

My face was streaked with tears when I pulled away. Gio cupped one of my cheeks and did the same with Amara with his other hand.

The corner of his mouth lifted in the only smile Gio usually gave. But it was genuine. He heard us. He believed us.

"*La mia famiglia*."

But I didn't miss how, after he murmured those words, his gaze lifted and locked on Tatiana.

There was definitely a story there, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to know it.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 44

TATIANA

I found myself back at Butcher and Son an hour after I'd left with my brothers.

Sneaking off and not letting the guards Dmitry and Nikolai had stationed at my apartment took some skill. But over the years I'd learned their schedules and how to sneak out with no one knowing.

They either didn't think there was an actual threat to me, that I would just blindly follow their rules because of who my brothers were, or they were lazy as hell.

Either way, I could've told my brothers that my guards lacked any kind of competence, but I wasn't about to have somebody's blood on my hands.

Because Dmitry and Nikolai would absolutely kill them for not protecting me the way they thought they should.

Besides, if I snitched on them, how would I get out so easily to go see *him*?

So with my guards thinking I was tucked away in bed, I had all night to do… whatever I wanted with *him***.**

I made my way past the thick crush of bodies who were still here watching the other fights. This was a stupid move, coming here unprotected where anything could happen.

But I felt like I was addicted, needing a rush that only one person could give me.

I kept to the dirty concrete wall as I made my way to the back where the locker room was. I knew there were Russians here that were working for my brothers. They patrolled the area and kept everyone in check, but they were easy to spot and so I kept away from them.

I pushed open the door and stepped into the room, closing it behind me and leaning against it as I took in the dark area.

A single lightbulb hung from the ceiling, casting this weird sort of glow.

I could hear the showers running off to my right, and moved toward the short hallway without thinking. The door that led into the washroom was partially open, steam billowing out.

I silently stepped inside, the warmth and humidity immediately surrounding me.

It took a moment for my vision to adjust to the foggy interior, but when it did, I spotted the person I'd come here to see standing under the spray of a showerhead.

Despite it being hours after we saw Gio fight, I knew he probably destroyed several more men in the ring after we left, and was just now showering that violence off.

The washroom had a toilet and urinal to the right. To the left was a large shower with white tile covering the walls and floor, and three showerheads positioned five feet from each other.

My heart was in my throat as I stared at Gio's back. All that hard, tattooed flesh had my body warming, softening, and getting wetter than the water soaking him.

God, I was already drenched.

I shamelessly let my gaze travel down his broad shoulders, defined back, and stared at his ass. He was so muscular everywhere, the percentage of his body fat no doubt being miniscule.

He had his hands braced on the wall in front of him, his head lowered, the water turning pink from the blood of the men he beat the shit out of disappearing down the drain by his feet.

And then he slowly turned his head, and my breath caught in my throat as our gazes locked.

He stood there a moment, just staring at me, not moving as the water cascaded down his naked body. Finally he straightened and turned around fully.

Like the shameless whore I was where it concerned him, I didn't stop myself from staring at his chiseled chest and going lower until I was gawking at his gigantic cock.

God, his dick was so hard already, and I knew he'd only get bigger. The massive twin weights of his balls hung under his shaft, swaying slightly as

he shifted on his feet.

“Why are you here, little girl?”

His voice was like aged whiskey. So smooth and deep and filling every part of me.

Him calling me *little girl* shouldn’t have turned me on the way it did.

I licked my lips and felt my pulse race at the low growl that came from him in response. “You know why,” I whispered.

“Do I?”

I glanced down at his shaft again, his cock so long and thick. I remembered how it hurt every time he forced his way inside of me, making me take every single inch until tears streamed down my face and I begged him to fuck me harder.

“Why do you act like I’m nothing to you after all we’ve done?”

He tipped his head to the side, watching me with a knowing look on his too-handsome face. “You know why.”

I swallowed, the humidity in the room making my too-thin shirt stick to my chest. His gaze flickered down to my breasts, and I felt my nipples harden further. I knew he could see through the white material, could see how braless I was.

I’d picked this outfit on purpose.

“You like the idea of me using you as my personal little whore. Isn’t that right, baby?”

I nodded instantly. I was messed up to like the degradation Gio gave me as he fucked me like I was his sex toy.

“Use your words and tell me why you’re here. And don’t fucking lie or I’ll spank your ass until you can’t sit comfortably.”

I closed my eyes and shivered, his words making my pussy tighten in response.

“I want you to use me.”

His cock visibly jerked and throbbed at that.

“Use you?” he questioned.

Gio was a sadist. He liked humiliating me by forcing me to tell him my nastiest fantasies.

“Use me like your slut.”

He hummed in pleasure. “Come here, baby.” He lowered his head slightly but kept his focus on me. “Come here and kneel in front of me. I’ll give you exactly what you need.”

I moved to him automatically, my mind and body knowing what it wanted. I sank to my knees and stared up at him, not caring that I was getting soaked.

His cock was so hard, thick drops of pre-cum forming at the tip before the water from the shower washed it away.

“My pretty little Russian doll wants some big, fat Italian cock. Isn’t that right?”

I nodded, so breathless.

He gripped that enormous dick in his tattooed fist and started stroking himself lazily. “You know what would happen if your crazy-ass brothers found out I took their little sister’s virginity and have been fucking her so raw she can’t walk right the next day?”

I swayed from the force of his obscene words. “They’d probably try to kill you.”

He chuckled, low and deep. “They could try,” he said in a tone that told me he didn’t give a shit, or even think Dmitry and Nikolai could hurt him.

“Enough talking. I want your mouth too full of dick to utter a word.” He gripped the back of my head, using my hair as leverage as he guided the crown to my mouth.

Gio smeared his pre-cum along my mouth like it was lipstick, and I greedily licked it off. I moaned at how good and salty he tasted.

“Open wide and show me how good you suck my cock. Be my good little whore, Tatiana.”

And I did just that.

OceanofPDF.com

EPILOGUE

DMITRY

We both collapsed onto the bed, a sweaty, exhausted mess. Fuck, being with Claudia was like a straight shot of heroin in my veins.

She shifted so she was lying on her side and reached over to run her fingers along the tattoos that lined my chest.

I curled my fingers around her hand and brought them to my mouth, kissing each one before resting our conjoined hands right under my pectoral muscle.

“Do these all have a story?” she asked sleepily and let her fingers skate over my sweat-slickened flesh.

I was trying to catch my breath after fucking the hell out of my wife… twice.

And despite getting off twice already, feeling Claudia pressed to my side, her tight little nipples moving against my skin with every tiny shift she made, my cock hardened all over again.

Fuck, my libido was never-ending where she was concerned.

“They do,” I finally answered and turned my head so I was looking at her. I gave her a slow smile, one I knew turned her on.

Truth was, I didn’t want to talk about the tattoos. They all meant something horrific and dark. My first kills. The times I almost died. How I felt if there was hell, I’d burn there once I died for all the heinous shit I’d done in my life.

Maybe she sensed my shift in emotions, because she rose slightly and pressed her lips to mine. I knew it was meant to be a soft, sweet kiss, maybe

one of comfort, but I wanted to fuck my wife again.

I tunneled my fingers into her hair and deepened the kiss. But she broke away, panting and shaking her head, denying me even though I knew she'd let me slide right in and take her all over again.

I pushed her gently onto the mattress so she was on her back, her gorgeous body naked so I could take a nice, leisurely glance over all that perfection. Her tits were bigger, her areolae a little darker. Her hips were filling out so that I could really grip them when I took her repeatedly.

And then I stared at her belly, the slight swell of it causing this primal reaction in me.

Pride. Happiness. Possessiveness.

My baby grew in there. My little girl.

I covered her belly and leaned in, kissing her skin and closing my eyes as I inhaled deeply. Claudia was only five months along, her belly still tiny. I couldn't wait to see how big her belly got, to feel my baby girl kicking.

"I can't wait to meet her," I murmured and gave her belly another kiss. "My sweet baby, Mischa."

Claudia ran her fingers through my short hair, and just a touch from her had my body reacting in the best possible fucking way.

I stared into her deep blue eyes that had transfixed me from the moment I looked into them. I knew then—even when I hadn't seen her as anything but Amara's younger sister—that she'd be special. I just didn't know how special she'd be to *me*.

"I want so many babies with you, *detka*," I murmured, feeling my body ratchet higher until I was ready to fuck her all over again. "As many as you want to give me." I brushed my lips back and forth over hers before kissing her lightly twice.

She said nothing in response, but the sweet smile she gave me and the way her expression softened told me my girl wanted that, too.

I rested back on the bed, and she immediately rolled toward me, setting her hand on my abdomen. I placed my palm right over hers and slid it over so it rested on my newest tattoo. I stared into Claudia's eyes, feeling my cold, dead heart beating only for her.

"Do you know what tattoo means the most to me? Do you want to know which one is my lifeline?"

Her breathing picked up and her pupils dilated. She adjusted herself, coming closer, and fuck did that feel good.

I moved our conjoined hands away so she could see the fresh ink in script tattooed right over my heart.

Malehnkaya ptichka

"*Eto ty. Moya malenkaya ptichka. Pryamo nad moim serdtsem. Tam gde tebe mesto*." I leaned in and kissed her. Slow and thorough. "This is you. My little bird. Right above my heart. Where you belong."

Claudia

Three years later

ROMAN WAILED SO loud I was pretty sure he reached decibels not known to the human species.

I murmured sweet Italian words to my baby boy and scooped him up out of the crib, bracing his chubby little body on my hip.

I could hear Mischa laughing from the living room, and a smile touched my lips as she spoke to Sasha. I left Roman's nursery and headed to the living room, where I saw Mischa scratching behind Sasha's ear. The dog licked her cheek, causing Mischa to giggle loudly.

Dmitry sat on the floor and leaned against the couch, his legs outstretched, his feet crossed at the ankle as he grinned as Mischa and Sasha played a few feet from him.

I adjusted Roman on my hip, my one-year-old baby boy not so little anymore. Although he'd been big when he was born. A whopping nine and a half pounds.

Not only was he the spitting image of Dmitry with a headful of thick black hair and bright blue eyes, it seemed he'd also be just as big when he grew up.

And then there was Mischa, our daughter who was tiny in body but fierce in spirit. Hell, she had a temper on her that rivaled any capo or Pakhan.

"Roman," she squealed and ran over, tripping over her feet and giggling.

Roman held his hands out and whined for Dmitry, who chuckled again and stood.

“Papa’s boy for sure,” I murmured. “I carried him and birthed him, still breastfeeding him, too, but all he wants is Papa.” I rolled my eyes, but it was all in teasing.

I loved that Roman was so attached to Dmitry, and that my husband was the best father I could have ever asked for.

“Everyone loves me, *detka*,” he said and leaned in and kissed me on the lips, lingering a little, which let me know if the kids were asleep he would have taken this further.

He pulled away far too soon, and I cleared my throat. He chuckled for a totally different reason. Gorgeous bastard knew the effect he still had on me.

He took Roman to the center of the living room so he could play with his toys. Sasha came over and gave our boy a wet kiss on the side of his head. Roman laughed but was soon too occupied playing with his blocks with Mischa.

I stood there a moment, staring at my family, feeling so much love for them it was bursting out of me. I’d never known this was what true happiness felt like, and knew it would only continue to grow.

These three souls brought meaning into my life. I was a sister, a wife, and a mother.

Dmitry glanced up at me and gave me a slow smile. He mouthed, *I love you*, malehnkaya ptichka.

My heart did that funny thing in my chest whenever he looked at me. And I knew what that was.

I was whole for the first time in my life.

The End.

OceanofPDF.com

About the Author

Want a **FREE** read? Grab your copy here:
https://dl.bookfunnel.com/70kysmttbw

Find Jenika at:

www.JenikaSnow.com
Jenika_Snow@yahoo.com

OceanofPDF.com